



The Paris Seamstress

Natasha Lester

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How much will a young Parisian seamstress sacrifice to make her mark in the male-dominated world of 1940s New York fashion?

1940. Parisian seamstress **Estella Bissette** is forced to flee France as the Germans advance. She is bound for Manhattan with a few francs, one suitcase, her sewing machine and a dream: to have her own atelier.

2015. Australian curator **Fabienne Bissette** journeys to the annual Met Gala for an exhibition of her beloved grandmother's work - one of the world's leading designers of ready-to-wear. But as Fabienne learns more about her grandmother's past, she uncovers a story of tragedy, heartbreak and secrets - and the sacrifices made for love.

Crossing generations, society's boundaries and international turmoil, **THE PARIS SEAMSTRESS** is the beguiling, transporting story of the special relationship between a grandmother and her granddaughter as they attempt to heal the heartache of the past.

Praise for Natasha Lester:

'[Lester's] engaging writing style and ability **to create characters that connect with readers** make her a welcome addition to the historical fiction market.' *Herald Sun*

'If you enjoy historical fiction (and even if you don't) you will love this book' **SALLY HEPWORTH**

'Hot on the heels of her well-deserved success with *A Kiss from Mr. Fitzgerald*, [Lester] again offers readers a strong-willed, determined heroine whose journey is as interesting, as it is inspiring' **JODI GIBSON**

'I love this book' **RACHAEL JOHNS**

'Stunning. Will have you captivated' **LIZ BYRSKI**

'Fascinating, evocative and meticulously researched.' **ANNABEL ABBS, author of *The Joyce Girl***

'If you're mad about the **roaring twenties** and all things Gatsby, this romance will have you enchanted' *Woman's Day*

'At the novel's heart is the sparkling Evie, an endearing combination of intelligence, determination and naivety' *West Australian*

The Paris Seamstress Details

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From Reader Review The Paris Seamstress for online ebook

Sharon says

Review to follow.

Carolyn says

The Paris Seamstress is a fantastic read by Natasha Lester.

Set in two different time-zones; 1940's Paris, France and New York to 2015.

You'll be swept away into another world of historical fiction, fashion designs, (learn all about cutting and sketching) fashion shows and the finest fabrics of plush velvet and gold to flowers set into the fabric of the 1940's.

It's an era when war is on and hard times hit France and New York starts to take over the Paris fashion scene with new ideas.

There's jazz piano, foxtrot, saxophone playing in the background.

Picnics on the lawn...

I absolutely loved it.

So, put on the Ritz and pour yourself a Sidecar cocktail as you while away the hours reading The Paris Seamstress.

Thank you, Natasha Lester for another fabulous novel.

Karen ?* says

Flipping back and forth between the early years of WWII and 2015, this novel follows the lives of Estella fleeing from occupied France to New York City ; and Fabienne, her granddaughter in Australia who has uncovered a family secret.

Lester first got on my radar with A Kiss from Mr Fitzgerald, and at the time we were doing an author Q&A with her so I went back and read her first two novels. I'm disappointed to say that I feel her earlier work was much better. It was emotive and thought provoking.

Since she has moved into Historical Fiction / Romance writing, it feels like she has not only become commercial, but many of her plot points border on comical. I'm not sure why so many soap opera tropes are required, but clearly they are popular (as are soap operas!). I also found the characters in this were just not well developed and the story took far too long to reach a conclusion. I was getting quite frustrated and bored towards the end just wanting to push through and finish.

I'm very sad to write this review because I really did think she was a great author, but these last two books

have not suited me at all, so I think it is time to say adieu and wish her well. I do hope she has great success with her new audience who are much more forgiving of her style and enjoy the ride.

Thanks to the publisher and NetGalley for providing me with an advanced reader copy in exchange for an honest review.

Jodi says

If you love being transported back in time to another world, you will fall in love with Natasha Lester's latest historical fiction, *The Paris Seamstress*.

The novel plays out like a black and white movie from days gone by, with a mix of class, charm, action, intrigue, and of course, heart. You almost see stars like Ava Gardner or Cary Grant in the lead roles, with the romantic streets of Paris and sophistication of New York's Fifth Avenue in 1941 as their backdrop.

The story line switches between the 1940s and present day, 2015, with main characters Estella and Fabienne Bissette – grandmother and granddaughter – holding a special bond. Both begin to unravel their linked family mystery in their respective timelines. Estella and Fabienne are strong protagonists. Characters that are charismatic and determined. And it is their inner strength that they need rely on to help them forge forward and follow their respective paths which ultimately draw together in an intriguing fashion, that is both heartfelt and heartbreaking.

Lester's prose is lyrical and poetic, without being overdone. In fact, it's a masterclass in how to write through the lens of your character with many of Estella's thoughts written as perfectly crafted fashion metaphors. As a writer, it's hard not to notice these things. Especially when they are done so effortlessly well. For the reader, it only adds to the beauty of the story.

What I loved in particular was the depth at which both storylines are written. It's hard to write dual storylines, yet alone dual storylines and timelines. As a reader you often find that one is more interesting than the other, however this is not the case with *The Paris Seamstress*. Both storylines are draped with drama, romance, longing, and relationship threads that are pulled together in a tender yet powerful conclusion.

Many novels have brought me to tears, as did this. But *The Paris Seamstress* was different. It is such a deep and profound emotion that Lester evokes within as you read the last few chapters. Emotion that will touch your heart and soul deeply, leaving you having to almost catch your breath.

In some ways, I wish I almost hadn't given Natasha Lester's two previous historical fiction novels, *A Kiss from Mr. Fitzgerald* and *Her Mother's Secret* five stars. Not because they weren't deserving, but because it leaves me with nowhere to go. *The Paris Seamstress* shows Lester's growth as an author. The story is deeper and more intricate, the characters stronger and rounder, and the narrative pacing flows seamlessly. It would appear, all I can do is give this story five GOLD stars to do it justice.

Kerran Olson says

Well I thought I couldn't become more emotionally invested in Natasha Lester's characters than I did in her previous novels, and yet here I am wiping away tears at midnight having just finished *The Paris Seamstress*.

This book is beautiful, with such strong characters, and such an intricately woven and fascinating premise. The dual narratives worked so well together, and I loved that I learned so much about fashion history. I really think that the characters grew so much throughout the course of the book, and the relationships progressed in such a believable, and sometimes heartbreaking, way. I loved Estella, and Lena, and Fabienne, and Sam, and Janie, and Alex, and Melissa, and Will, and Mrs Pardy, because they were all such different and complex characters. I loved the Paris that Estella loved, and the New York she came to call home, and Fabienne's New York. I loved all the little details about clothes, and fashion design, and Tiffany's, and war time life, and I loved Leo's appearance, and the dark undertones of the Harry plot and Alex's past. I've said love about 50 times in this review, but I'll say it one more time because I really just loved The Paris Seamstress! I think this is Natasha's best book yet, and I will eagerly anticipate next year's release whilst recommending this book to all my book loving friends and family.

Helen says

I am left speechless and emotional after reading this awesome story WOW, this is the first Natasha Lester book I have read and I need to fix that because here is an author that you don't want to miss, this is just so beautifully written, moving, emotional I loved it, a story across two timelines World War II 1940's and 2015, fabulous characters that show love, strength and what they go through, secrets to uncover and love to find. I do highly recommend this book.

The story starts in 1940 in Paris the Germans are coming to Paris and Estella Bisette a young seamstress is sent to Manhattan by her mother after she helps with secret papers and meets a man she will never forget, she has very little in her pockets but she has a sewing machine and hope and strength, she meets Sam on her way over and then Janie when she gets there and then her life changes when she meets Lena and Alex and there is a lot to learn and fashions to create.

It is now 2015 Australia and a young curator Fabienne Bisette is travelling to New York for her beloved grandmother's Gala exhibition of her fashions, a lot has happened in the past year for Fabienne, the death of her father she has just taken on a new job and sadly her grandmother is getting frailer as she gets older. Fabienne has doubts on whether she could take over Stella Designs as her grandmother wishes and is sent to Paris for the weekend where she meets Will and these two inspire each other. When her grandmother suffers a stroke and is trying to tell her things that she needs to know, life again changes when she uncovers heartbreaking secrets that in the end will make her stronger.

Really this is such an emotional story I loved it from page one I savoured every word every trip to Paris and Manhattan and from the 1940's to 2015 from Estella and Fabienne and all of the characters that we get to know and love. The love the strength the pain the heartache and yes the joy that is there, I bow down to you MS Lester this story is going to stay with me for a long time to come I have tears in my eyes typing this review and cannot highly recommend it enough thank you for a fabulous story.

Brenda says

Estella Bisette was a seamstress, working with her mother at the atelier in Paris. It was all she had known, having grown up with a needle in her hand and her mother's fashion by her side. But Germany's approach on France in 1940 saw Estella flee the only home she'd known, heading to Manhattan on the *SS Washington* - the last American ship to leave French waters.

When Fabienne Bissette arrived in Manhattan from Sydney for the Gala of her grandmother, Estella's work in 2015, she was once again shocked at how her grandmother had aged. Ninety-seven years of age, she was frail - but her strength of mind and love for her granddaughter shone through.

But the recent death of her father had made Fabienne realise there were things she didn't know about her family history - about her grandmother's past. Would Estella explain it all to Fabienne? Or was it destined to remain in the past?

The Paris Seamstress by Aussie author Natasha Lester is, in my humble opinion, this author's best novel to date. Based on fact (some of the characters existed, as do the buildings, some of which are central to the story); I feel at a loss to voice my thoughts...

*'When you awaken in the morning's hush I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight. I am the soft stars that shine at night. Do not stand at my grave and cry; I am not there. I did not die.'*

What can I say? This is a deeply emotional book which is heartbreaking, while being filled with courage and love; of secrets that were necessary during the German occupation of France - I don't think I have ever read a book so profound and which made me feel so much. An outstanding novel which just makes me say to the author - Bravo!

With grateful thanks to Hachette AU for my ARC to read and review.

ABCme says

Thank you Netgalley and Little Brown Book Group for the ARC.

The Paris Seamstress is a story of fabulous fun and heartbreaking sadness in times of war. Combine this with a good mystery, et voila: historical fiction at its best!

The book first takes us to 1940's Paris where we get to know Estella and her mother Jeanne and their life as seamstresses for the big names in fashion.

When war is closing in on Paris, Jeanne sends her daughter to New York. Estella soon makes friends and life in the Garment District is one big adventure filled with fashion, fun and jazz.

Then the mystery enters the story and we start switching between the fashionable 40's and Estella's granddaughter Fabienne in 2015. Fabienne has inherited the fashionhouse after Estella's death and is left with tons of questions about her past.

The story mainly takes place in the 1940's and unfolds a life filled with pain and sadness, despite the happy world of fashion. The mystery twists and turns all the way through and leaves the reader guessing until the end. Very well crafted, fast paced excitement.

What happens in 2015 is added bonus, not the main story, although there are similarities and of course connections to the 1940's events.

I really enjoyed this book, even though the family structure had me confused now and then. There is a good balance between the cheerful fashionworld, the horrors of war and the complex workings of family secrets. The characters are indepth and easy to identify with. The surroundings are beautiful.

The Paris Seamstress is about strong woman and fierce friends. An entertaining and deeply moving read.

Kathryn says

The Paris Seamstress is a dual time line book, that ranges in setting from Paris to New York to Australia. One era is the war years - and the effects on France especially. The other era is one recent and modern. And through the years there is the mystery of family and friendships. It tracks the endeavours of one woman - Estelle and her love of designing dresses and other clothing. When she finds herself in New York her journey begins.

The story is a huge roller coaster. There are highs and lows, at times it is quite dark and other times filled with hope and courage. It is an emotional read that documents the story of two women linked through family, and the people they are friends with and the people they deeply love.

While Estelle had many set backs, she continued on, at times she made mistakes and yet what a woman. I loved when she realises that a bully can have their 'power' taken from them. She is talented, far-sighted, loyal and loving.

Fabienne is hit with many surprises as she learns the story of her grandmother Estelle through various revelations. Fabienne too is challenged to live life to the full, to develop her own talents and believe they can take her places. As well she comes to realise the power and passion of love, and can she grab it or let it flow out through her fingers.

If you like a book with women who have a passion for what they do, you love clothing, enjoy dual time lines and can appreciate a book of highs and lows, secrets slowly revealed - some shocking, then this book is for you.

Bianca says

3.5 stars

Natasha Lester is known for her historical romance novels which feature strong, independent female characters.

The main character of *The Paris Seamstress* is Estella Bisette, who in 1940 manages to get out of the soon to be occupied Paris, on the last boat to New York. She's got limited funds but she dreams that one day she'll get to be a clothes designer. During her sea voyage to New York she meets a young man, Sam, who is very interested in clothes cutting. A happy coincidence. Estella has a temper so she gets herself fired from several jobs within a short period.

On a night out she meets again a mysterious man whom she had briefly met in Paris. His name is Alex and he's a British - American spy pretending to be a lawyer. He's extremely attractive and he's got a reputation of a player. He also introduces Estella to her doppelganger. And from that point on the things get complicated and complex. I won't say much more because it'll spoil it for you.

Natasha Lester wrote an ambitious novel - which was meticulously researched. I appreciated the period details and even the clothes making segments - although I have very little interest in fashion these days.

In saying all that, I found myself unable to suspend my disbelief on several occasions. That prevented me from fully engaging with the story.

There were too many convenient coincidences, complications and so many secrets, I was getting whiplash. It may very well be just me, as I don't care for unnecessary drama in my life and it seems I have the same issues when it comes to fictional drama.

The Paris Seamstress is a detailed historical romance novel that will keep you turning the pages, especially if you enjoy untangling family secrets.

I've received this ARC in exchange for a honest review. Many thanks to Hachette Australia for the opportunity to read and review this novel.

This also goes towards my Australian Author Challenge on www.bookloverbookreviews.com

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘Always be who you are right now.’

Two women, Estella Bisette and her granddaughter Fabienne Bisette. Two interconnected stories spanning seventy-five years.

In 1940, Estella Bisette flees from Paris as the Germans advance. She leaves for Manhattan with very little money, one suitcase and her sewing machine. Estella dreams of one day having her own atelier. In 2015, Fabienne Bisette travels from Australia to the annual Met Gala for an exhibition of her grandmother's work. Estella Bisette had achieved her dream: she is regarded as one of the world's leading designers of ready-to-wear clothing.

Fabienne knows little about her grandmother's past and can spend little time with her because of her work in Australia. Estella wants to tell Fabienne about the past but has always been concerned about the timing.

The story unfolds both in the past and in the present. Fabienne has decisions to make, while Estella's past contains more than a few secrets and heartaches. Two strong and determined women each keen in her own way (and in her own time) to prove themselves.

I enjoyed most aspects of this novel, but one twist close to the end left me cold. I pushed it to the side of my consciousness (it's fiction, I can do that) and continued on. I found most of the characters interesting and believable and I really enjoyed the descriptions of designing and making dresses. I admired the way in which Estella had carved a niche for herself, and finished the book hoping that Fabienne would do the same.

I'll be looking out for Ms Lester's other novels: this is the first of hers I have read.

Note: My thanks to NetGalley and Hachette Australia for providing me with a free electronic copy of this book for review purposes.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Theresa Smith Writes says

The Paris Seamstress is my favourite novel from Natasha Lester so far. I loved it, was completely captivated from start to finish, barely even registering the pages that were flying by. There's a total immersion aspect to this novel that is all too rare. Natasha doesn't just write about her chosen topic and set it in an arbitrary place; she plunges you into that world, visiting the places and experiencing as much of the life she's writing about as possible, securing a level of authenticity only second to experiencing it yourself. You only need to follow Natasha on social media to appreciate the dedication she applies to this world building. While I was reading The Paris Seamstress this week, Natasha was posting research highlights from the novel, complete with photos and background information. It's utterly fantastic and provides the reader with such a rich context to draw from. I really love that sharing of information between the author and reader that's made possible through social media.

I will happily admit up front that I love fashion. My grandmother was a dressmaker, professionally in Europe before she married and then just piece work after that. She made the most amazing outfits, for herself as well as us, and also made a lot of bulk items for markets. Her sewing room was located in what most families use as a rumpus room nowadays, quite large, but she needed it to be to accommodate the huge table, multiple sewing machines, dressmaker dummies, and shelves upon shelves of patterns and fabrics and tools and threads—the list goes on. I learnt to sew from her and while I didn't mind it, I preferred drawing designs and playing around with the fabric, leaving the actual sewing to Grandma, who was a natural and far better at it. I don't sew at all now, barely even mend, and all of my clothes are off the rack. But the love is still there and I remember the feel of fabric, taut beneath your scissors, that crisp sound as you cut out the pieces ready for a new outfit. I think I might have liked Sam's career, as a cutter, to be honest. I never had as much as enthusiasm for working on the project once the cutting was done. All of this of course would have greatly enhanced my enjoyment of The Paris Seamstress, but even so, I think this is a novel that anyone can enjoy, special interest in fashion or not. There's so much in this novel to love and draw from, so much to weep over and celebrate; enjoying fashion is just a bonus.

The dual narrative appealed to me from the outset. It's a technique in historical novels I favour. Natasha arranged this novel really well too, with clearly set out parts identifying which era and character you were presently reading. I always find this useful as it's quite easy to get swept up in a historical saga and not notice the pages and chapters slipping through your fingers. Both Estella and Fabienne were incredible women, I didn't favour either one over the other and enjoyed spending time with both of them equally. The story was weighted more to Estella, but I expected this given that Fabienne was uncovering her grandmother's past alongside making some crossroads decisions of her own. But essentially, the story was Estella's, and I enjoyed how Natasha made that work in with Fabienne's sections. It was so engaging, right the way through. I couldn't believe how lost in this novel I became.

Much of this story is heartbreaking, as stories about any war tend to be. When you deal in truth and history, this is an expected side effect. What I do want to commend Natasha for, is the lack of sugar coating. Some characters in this novel have some pretty awful things happen to them; likewise, there are awful characters within the story. Too often, this can come off as watered down, as though the author is holding back so as not to offend delicate sensibilities. I don't mean to infer that there is any gratuitous content within this novel, far from it, but rather, there's the sharp truth, uncovered, stripped back. I love that sort of honesty, that truth telling woven into fiction. It's a rare talent to hit that delicate balance with such perfection, and it's so

important for success in historical fiction, particularly when you are reflecting upon and examining issues such as the representation of women throughout history. To return briefly to the research aspect of this novel, what an incredibly detailed story this is. Absolutely sublime. Natasha has such talent for weaving fact into her fiction, it's a seamless immersion, you learn so much and you are constantly marvelling over the finite details imparted. For all this, the narrative is never overloaded or weighted down by facts. She really is a marvel.

The emotions wrought within me while reading *The Paris Seamstress* were wide reaching. I loved the characters, I loved the tension and the heart ache, the unveiling of the secrets, bit by bit, but not too stretched out. The twists and turns that I didn't see coming, the things I hoped for that were realised. This is top shelf historical fiction, definitely a title you could give as a gift with ease. I am so excited for what Natasha will be writing next. Her novels are always so good, yet keep getting better—how is that possible?! This is a great title for book clubs and while I try to never make comparisons, I did feel that this novel was reminiscent of other great sagas I've read, particularly *The Spoils of Time* saga by the late Penny Vincenzi. Masterpieces themselves, so I hope you'll forgive my sneaky comparison there!

Thanks is extended to Hachette Australia for providing me with a copy of *The Paris Seamstress* for review.

Jennifer says

This book was a bit of a slog for me and took me a lot longer to finish it than I thought it would. I found it hard going, one dimensional and flat.

My reasons?

I found the writing clumsy and ham-fisted. Lester was too busy telling us to show us. She was telling us how beautiful dresses were, how beautiful scenery was, how beautiful characters were and how ugly a few were. It is sometimes necessary to tell, but as a general rule, writing is at its best when it shows. There was way too much telling going on here.

The other reason was, I felt that Lester did nothing to challenge any stereotypes or any assumptions. The characters who I thought were all supposed to be good were good, those who were supposed to be bad were, and they all had the characteristics that I expected them to have. There was nothing to challenge the reader, or at least this reader. This lack of nuance and the unexpected left the reading experience flat for me.

I did quite like the plot, but it was not enough. I never felt for the characters, could not identify with them in anyway and while I wanted to find out what happened, I never really cared about what happened.

Kate Forsyth says

A dual-timeline novel that moves between the 1940s and contemporary times, *The Paris Seamstress* is a gorgeously rich and romantic novel about young women finding their way in the world.

The story begins with Estella Bissette, a young apprentice seamstress working with her mother at a fashion designer's atelier in Paris. Her metier is creating silk flowers, but she dreams of designing her own dresses and takes every opportunity to practise her craft. But the Nazis are closing on France, and no-one knows what the future will hold. One day Estella gets caught up in a mysterious errand that smacks of intrigue and resistance ... and meets a handsome stranger. With her life in danger, she must flee France, and with her mother's help, gets a bunk on the SS Washington - the last American ship to leave French waters – with nothing more than a suitcase and a sewing machine.

The other narrative thread concerns Estelle's granddaughter Fabienne, who arrives in Manhattan from Sydney for a celebration of her famous ancestor's fashion designs. Fabienne is puzzled by some mystery in her grandmother's past which the recent death of her father has revealed to her, and wishes to question her ... but Estella is elderly and frail, and talk of the past upsets her. At the gala event, Fabienne meets a handsome stranger ... but her own life is full of problems and troubles, and it seems unlikely their paths will ever cross again.

From that point onwards, the two stories cross and part and cross again, full of sensual descriptions of fabulous clothes and evocative descriptions of Paris and New York, then and now. I loved the story of how determined Estella builds her career from nothing, despite obstacle after obstacle, and I empathised with sensitive Fabienne, trying to step out from her grandmother's shadow.

Much of the pleasure of this book is the wish-fulfillment fantasy it offers many women – the chance to imagine oneself in a swishy satin gown, drinking cocktails with high society in New York, flitting off to Paris on a whim and meeting the man of your dreams, inheriting palatial residences in two of the city's most glamorous and sophisticated cities, making a name for oneself with your talent and hard work. The secret at the heart of the novel is not one of those surprising, oh-my-god-I-never-saw-that-coming plot twists that leaves you gasping – it's more of a device to put the two women's journeys into motion. But both of those journeys are so beguiling, I didn't mind that at all.

And I just loved Estella's final words to her granddaughter:

'Be brave. Love well and fiercely. Be the woman I always knew you would be.'

These are wise and beautiful words indeed.

Kali Napier says

What Natasha Lester does so well in her books is to create strong, gutsy female characters, who are driven to succeed, not just for the external rewards of fame and fortune, but by a desire to make a mark, to prove to the men of the world that women are worth a damn, and by their faith in love. Natasha has done it again with *The Paris Seamstress*, and like her previous two books, most of the story takes place in New York – that golden city where dreams can come true. However, unlike her previous two historical fiction novels, *The Paris Seamstress* is a dual timeline story, focusing on Estella Bissette in 1940/1, a young seamstress who must flee the German occupation of Paris to New York with her sewing machine. In 2015, Estella's granddaughter Fabienne Bissette is invited to an exhibition of her grandmother's dresses in New York, which sets her off on a journey of discovery, of the ways that love can hurt and heal.

The language of fashion shares commonalities with that of narrative and story-telling. We speak of fashioning a story, weaving plot threads, revealing and concealing backstory, among many other expressions. Natasha Lester's writing is bedazzled with such metaphors. (Alyssa – you will love it!) One of the central motifs is of the two ways love works: as a toile that shapes a life, and as a thread that pulls it together.

Throughout both storylines, readers encounter all kinds of love: sibling, maternal, paternal, friendship, at first sight, slow burn.

Like the signature flowers that adorn Estella's designs, Natasha Lester's signature is to pick up a thread of a character from a previous novel and weave them into the next. Leo Richier from *Her Mother's Secret* makes a cameo appearance here, and I look forward to seeing which character pops up in Natasha's next book.
