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The Perfume Collector: A Novel



Synopsis

A remarkable novel about secrets, desire, memory, passion, and possibility. Newlywed Grace Monroe doesn't fit anyone's expectations of a successful 1950s London socialite, least of all her own. When she receives an unexpected inheritance from a complete stranger, Madame Eva d'Orsey, Grace is drawn to uncover the identity of her mysterious benefactor. Weaving through the decades, from 1920s New York to Monte Carlo, Paris, and London, the story Grace uncovers is that of an extraordinary woman who inspired one of Paris's greatest perfumers. Immortalized in three evocative perfumes, Eva d'Orsey's history will transform Grace's life forever, forcing her to choose between the woman she is expected to be and the person she really is. The Perfume Collector explores the complex and obsessive love between muse and artist, and the tremendous power of memory and scent.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This was a very entertaining book for those who enjoyed *The Paris Architect* or *A Perfumer's Secret*. It alternates stories from the perspective of Grace Monroe, young upper class London wife of the 1950's and a poor young orphan Eva D'Orsey, originally from France, whose story plays out

beginning in the 1920's. The fates of these two are connected when Grace discovers she has been named the sole heir of Eva, recently deceased. The fact that Grace has never heard of Eva provides an intriguing mystery. The switching of settings, historical periods and society perspectives makes for a very entertaining story, especially for those fascinated as I am by tales of Europe in the years leading up to the Second World War. Lyrical descriptions of perfumes and the process of creating them add almost a spiritual element to the novel. It certainly made me think about the world of fragrance in a whole new light.

The plot was unique and the story held my attention. My one complaint would concern editing. There were lots of errors. A couple could have been overlooked...it's difficult if not impossible to be perfect, but there were more than a couple errors, there were many. It was to the point of some sentences not making sense at all, or even at one point getting one character mixed up with another. The errors increased as the book went on, making the story difficult to finish, which was unfortunate.

The book started slowly, and at first, the seemingly disconnect narratives were perplexing. Gradually though, the story starts to draw you in and slowly you realize that there are two very different and yet seemingly identical women speaking with you, letting you into their lives at a pivotal moment and inviting you in to walk alongside them as their lives change. The author does an excellent job of portraying these two women in the present tense, though the two storylines are years apart. This is a must read. And once you complete it, you'll understand when I say the story unravels the same was a perfume develops.

I had high hopes for this after reading the first beautifully written scene and indeed the writing is good throughout. The descriptions of perfume are the best part of the book, which is not great considering a story with such elements should have been moving. I am an emotional person, and I didn't come close to shedding a tear for any of the main characters. In fact, by 80% I was getting irritated by their shallowness. Grace's purchase of an expensive dress does not make her a transformed woman. In fact, she seems sort of dim when she signs a business deal without reading the terms. That's not admirable. It's just stupid. Eva's act of vengeance against a woman who betrayed her disgusted me. The last ten percent almost made me change my mind and give this four stars. There were some well written scenes with emotion there, but it was really too late for me to connect with these unlikable characters. You learn that Eva does some heroic, perhaps even

self-destructive, things to save her friend, but given the outcome, it comes off as pointless. And why mention her disappointment that Andre doesn't sleep with her anymore? He's gay. We know that from the start and so does she. The romance between Grace and the lawyer was completely unbelievable. There was little to lead up to that. The husband was written off in one sentence. And the father of Grace should not have been introduced in the last ten percent of the story. Again, it's just too late for me to care. I feel like the author focused too much on what wasn't important and not enough on developing what could have been a great story. This was really a 3.5 stars for me.

Received a recommendation from the kindle site. I am an avid reader of historical fiction. The character development was very good in this Book. Liked all the characters involved. I got "into" it very quickly and seemed to read it fast. I learned quite a bit about the making of perfume. Recommend this read!!

I loved everything about The Perfume Collector. Each character is believable with flaws and strengths. I like that the story is not told in a linear fashion (chronologically) but weaves back and forth, giving us pieces of the puzzle when it fits. This is a book I will re-read.

This book has much to recommend it: stunning sensory descriptions, an intriguing if somewhat obvious plot whereby Grace, a London housewife in the 50's, inherits an apartment in Paris from a woman unknown to her. The first half of the book lives up to expectations starting with Eva at the end of her life. "The doctor understood nothing. He didn't know what it was like to live between memory and regret with nothing to numb it." The second half disappoints as if parts were edited out and others added. Quick solutions, fewer insights, great build up but fails to connect in the end. However, this book is one of the kind that will stay with me and I may want to re-read for the sheer enjoyment of the wonderful descriptions. "The world is defined by smells not words or shapes or sounds. This is the language that makes sense, that everyone understands. In the silence of fragrance, Eva saw how ambiguous, complex stories could be told. You could be laughing in public yet wear, right on the surface of your skin, a perfume ripe with longing, dripping with regret, shining with hope, all at the same time. It would fade as the day faded." The reader will remember Eva even though her metamorphosis from chamber maid to gambler to older woman is glossed over much too fast as is her defining role during WWII. Grace also changes from dependent housewife to understanding who she is and how she will lead her life in the future.

I couldn't put down this captivating tale of a young lady, Grace, uncovering family roots. Indeed she's given the right to choose her path in an era where it was ludicrous for women to want more than a husband and children.

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