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The Dressmaker: A Novel



Synopsis

A darkly satirical novel of love, revenge, and 1950s haute couture—now a major motion picture starring Kate Winslet, Judy Davis, Liam Hemsworth, and Hugo Weaving opening September 23rd—After twenty years spent mastering the art of dressmaking at couture houses in Paris, Tilly Dunnage returns to the small Australian town she was banished from as a child. She plans only to check on her ailing mother and leave. But Tilly decides to stay, and though she is still an outcast, her lush, exquisite dresses prove irresistible to the prim women of Dungatar. Through her fashion business, her friendship with Sergeant Farrat—the town's only policeman, who harbors an unusual passion for fabrics—and a budding romance with Teddy, the local football star whose family is almost as reviled as hers, she finds a measure of grudging acceptance. But as her dresses begin to arouse competition and envy in town, causing old resentments to surface, it becomes clear that Tilly's mind is set on a darker design: exacting revenge on those who wronged her, in the most spectacular fashion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this in anticipation of the movie which is currently being shot based on *The Dressmaker*. The general scenario and many individual scenes will allow a fabulous film to be produced. Set in the 50s in rural Australia; a highly talented 'dressmaker' returns to a small country town. The cavalcade of characters is fascinating, from a cross-dressing copper to the general bitchy gossips. There is love and pain and a great deal of satirical insight. I enjoyed the book and eagerly await the movie.

A highly engaging dark and quirky tale set in a 1950s rural Australian country town with a surreal touch. The protagonist and heroine Tilly Dunnage who returns to her hometown to attend to her elderly and infirm mother, stays despite being inflicted with the same disapproval the parochial town folk subjected her to when she was shunned as a young child. Despite Tilly returning as an accomplished dressmaker, unrecognisable and sophisticated most of the town treats her with suspicion, derision and continue to circulate malicious gossip. The story with its colourful cast of characters has a distinctly Australian flavour but manages to avoid being too narrow in its appeal. Worldly Tilly presents as a stark contrast and breath of fresh air to the moralistic women of the town who still relegate her to the status of a lowly outcast. Despite the resentment she faces she manages to gain the admiration and friendship of Sergeant Farrat, the town's policeman who is also a mysterious character with his own secrets. Local football star, Teddy is also enchanted by Tilly and although their romance flourishes it also brings a host of surprises. Although the story delivers light hearted moments and the satisfaction of Tilly's revenge, it is laced with dark humour. Although, Tilly's talent as a dressmaker and the stunning dresses she makes gains the envy and some respect from those who consider her inferior this is a stark contrast to the brooding darkness that permeate the story. Secrets and pain from the past haunt and hunt Tilly as they simmer beneath the surface and are omnipresent throughout the novel. Much of the story sustains this Gothic element juxtaposed Ham's engaging literary style.

Rosalie Ham's heroine, Tilly, returns to the provincial town of her childhood with the skills and wisdom of a world traveller. Harbours hurt memories from long ago, she weaves her own special magic, just as she creates wearable art for the ignorant townies. As Rosalie Ham's first novel unfolds, the reader can see, smell and move through Tilly's jumbled and dusty hometown of Dungatar - possum piss, old tyres, lavender flowers, chugging farm trucks, kids and wheat. Who will die, who will live? Who is marked for life? Who will explode out of their drab life in one of Tilly's creations? Who wears home-made gingham under their uniform? Read "The Dressmaker" and find out.

Characters are so interesting and somewhat bizarre. Small town intrigues and interrelationships. The town is full of people with various personality "problems" and histories. You don't have to be Australian to get this, but there could be some confusing things. I loved it, and read it very quickly - was sorry that it ended, and such an ending! A great read.

This book was recommended to me by a friend and I absolutely loved it. A wonderful portrayal of small-town Australia, with narrow-minded, suspicious locals challenged when a wonderfully independent and talented woman returns after many years' absence.

This book is a beautiful evocation of life in rural Australia with all its pressures, gossip, petty concerns and pretensions. Instantly recognisable to anyone who grew up in a small town. And then the fabulous fantasy of Tilly's dresses & the vastness of the wheat plains. So intricate and vast. I loved it.

Really choppy writing and unremarkable story line. Most characters were mean spirited and unattractive. Read it for book club and couldn't wait to get it over with. Best characterization was the mother, who supposed to be mean, but also crazy. Some of us liked the gay officer, who was one of the only sympathetic individuals in the book. The bits of sexual content were crude and seemed to be there for just that purpose. Scored one out of six in the club. I hear it is going to be a movie. Lots of luck.

I was really looking forward to reading this as I had read her previous book "Summer at Mt Hope" and was really please that one had been made into a movie. Unfortunately although I did enjoy the read it also reminded me of all the things that had annoyed me in the previous book. There are some amazing characters but I don't think they get treated with with enough depth, the plot has some amazing twists but the never really get developed, and the fragments we learn about Tilly's past, which underpin the entire story, are only ever treated superficially. I would have liked to see a much better developed story and a better paced ending - I feel it was resolved far too quickly and simplistically - my main criticism of "Summer at Mt Hope" - it feels like there's a word limit that can't be exceeded and the story has taken up too words so the ending must be crammed into the small number of words left. It left me unsatisfied. Am now going to see the movie and hoping that perhaps some of these issues are resolved in the script.

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