

The Lily in the Snow

Reading Group Guide

About the book

Amid the decadence and instability of Berlin in the 1920s, a band of women must unite to save all that is precious to them.

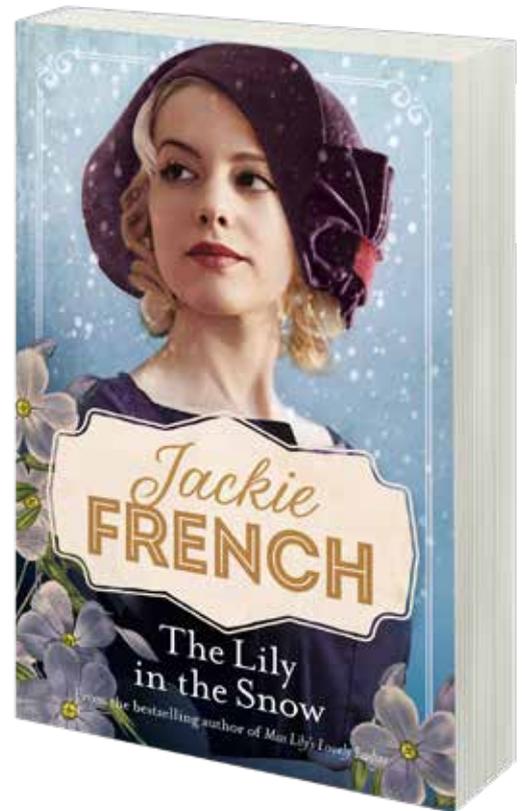
With her dangerous past behind her, Australian heiress Sophie Higgs lives in quiet comfort as the Countess of Shillings, until Hannelore, Princess of Arneburg, charms the Prince of Wales. He orders Sophie, Nigel — and Miss Lily — to investigate the mysterious politician Hannelore believes is the only man who can save Europe from another devastating war.

His name is Adolf Hitler.

Long-lost love 'John' has also returned to Sophie's life, as well as a young woman determined to kill the woman she believes betrayed the female war-time resistance fighters of La Dame Blanche: her mother, Miss Lily Shillings.

As unimaginable peril threatens to destroy countries and tear families apart, Sophie must face Goering's Brownshirt Nazi thugs, blackmail, and the many possible faces of love.

The third book in the Miss Lily series, *The Lily in the Snow* is a story filled with secrets that also explores the strength of friendship and the changing face of women in this new Europe.





Jackie French on the Miss Lily series

I accidentally came across the ‘lost’ women of WWI when reading an account of a relief organisation that Alice B Toklas and Gertrude Stein ran in France in the middle of the war. What were two American women, with no experience in such things doing in a war zone?

The more I looked, the more women I found. Firstly hundreds, thousands, then tens of thousands. These women are not in the official histories, partly because those histories were official and most of the women were not official – and therefore not members of the Red Cross, army nurses or drivers. It is only when you read letters written at the time: ‘French women came out with pots of stew, first hot food we had in weeks’; ‘We rode in bullock carts driven by French farmers’ wives’, or look at the hospital records of wounded soldiers and see how few were sent to an official hospital, that you see the enormous, vital role of women in feeding, transporting and coping with the wounded and the dead. At some stage, nearly all badly wounded men were sent, if only for convalescence, to a woman’s home that had been turned quickly, and usually extremely efficiently, into a hospital.

The female telegraph line workers who laid cables under fire have also been left out of history as they worked for the post office, not the army, and so were omitted from war records. Thousands of women from England, the USA, Canada and Australia opened canteens or acquired and then drove ambulances. They would drive to where the battle was fiercest, load the wounded onto their trucks or vans, then drive them to the nearest aide post – sometimes run by women too – until the wounded could be transferred to an official medical facility – or died. The women and their ambulances then returned to the fighting to bring in another load, and then another.

These women died. They were wounded. And all, at some stage, suffered hideous infections from the conditions under which they worked. But those who survived were indomitable.

The only successful espionage and resistance network in WWI was also run by women. Though it was officially under male British control, and founded by two Belgian men, the oral histories of the women of La Dame Blanche made it clear that the British were ‘useful’, but not to be trusted. And able-bodied men were all too obvious to be successful spies or resistance workers in occupied France and Belgium.

Every railway station occupied by the Germans had a woman sitting on the platform, knitting. They knitted a code, which was passed on, that contained information such as numbers of troops and destinations and armament details. They worked in small groups or ‘cells’ that included the women in one family or a group of friends, each cell only knowing one in another cell, so that if captured they could give little away. But very few were captured. Nor, after the war, were they keen to tell their story. Those women knew well that ‘peace’ was temporary. That one day they would need to watch and fight again.

This is the background to the Miss Lily series. The books are not just about how the role of women changes, from 1912 to 1946, but how we as women, think of ourselves.



Jackie French on the Miss Lily series

Sophie, the Australian corned beef heiress sent to England for social polishing in 1913, finds herself at 'Miss Lily's' informal – and most secret – school for girls of good families; the ones who have the potential to change the world. But in 1913 a woman's power only comes from the men she can influence, such as husbands, fathers or lovers. Miss Lily teaches her students to excel at manipulating men, as well as to work for peace between nations.

But in WWI Sophie learns that she is also her father's daughter: a businesswoman, not just a debutante, and creates an empire of hospitals and refugee relief across France and Belgium. In the 1920s she grows her father's business empire. And 'Miss Lily', who it seems has no official existence, vanishes. Perhaps she fought too hard for the cause of peace.

The Lily in the Snow sees Miss Lily's return – and much more. This series is carefully crafted so that you think you know each character and that everything you know is true. There is, however, more than you ever realised, so you must reassess, again and again, as indeed the world has done, as women slowly take up a full partnership in humanity.

In this book you meet Violette, born of war, educated by war. And Hannelore, a German princess who had lost her estates to the Russian revolutionaries, but who believes she has found the man who will not just make Germany great again, but keep peace in Europe – Adolf Hitler. For his sake, she will blackmail the Prince of Wales to order her dearest friend, Sophie, as well as Sophie's husband, Nigel, Earl of Shillings, and the elusive Miss Lily too, to meet Hitler amid the dangers of Berlin where Fascists fight communists on street corners and in cafes, and whispers can bring death.

And if you have read *The Lily and the Rose*, you will think you know Miss Lily. When you begin *The Lily in the Snow* you will find you don't. And when you pick up the next Miss Lily book you will find yet another layer, because that is what history is, and who every person is, especially those extraordinary women who changed from flower-arrangers to espionage agents, from cooks to warriors, and yet were still mothers, lovers, wives.

This is the history of who we women were, and how we changed. But the stories are filled with breathless adventure, superb clothes and the most excellent cherry cake, crumpets with honey and dainty crustless sandwiches. As Miss Lily might say, 'It is in times of crisis that one most appreciates an egg and lettuce sandwich and a strong cup of China tea.'



About the author



Jackie French AM is an award-winning writer, wombat negotiator, the 2014–2015 Australian Children’s Laureate and the 2015 Senior Australian of the Year. In 2016 Jackie became a Member of the Order of Australia for her contribution to children’s literature and her advocacy for youth literacy. She is regarded as one of Australia’s most popular authors and writes across all genres – from picture books, history, fantasy, ecology and sci-fi to her much loved historical fiction for a variety of age groups. ‘Share a Story’ was the primary philosophy behind Jackie’s two-year term as Laureate.

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Praise for the Miss Lily series

‘The story is equal parts Downton Abbey and wartime action, with enough romance and intrigue to make it 100% not-put-down-able.’

Australian Women’s Weekly on Miss Lily’s Lovely Ladies

‘If you’ve sped your way through *The Crown* and are looking for another historical drama fix to sink your teeth into, *The Lily and The Rose* is going to fast become your next obsession.’

New Idea on The Lily and the Rose



Reading Group Questions

1. Hannelore idolises Hitler. Yet she is a woman of intelligence, education and sense. In 1929, when this book is set given the (true) utterances of Hitler in this book, would you have — just possibly — agreed with Hannelore?
2. Sophie loves two men: her husband, Nigel, and ‘John’, the mentally scarred veteran of *The Lily and the Rose* who she now meets again as Dr Daniel Greenman. Can one have two equally deep kinds of love for such different men?
3. In *Miss Lily’s Lovely Ladies* and *The Lily and the Rose*, Green and Jones were portrayed primarily as servants, known for the quality of their service. Now, in *The Lily in the Snow*, they become major characters in their own right. Are there any other characters in this series who seem less significant, but may play a major role as the series continues?
4. James Lorrimer and Ethel Carryman are an unlikely couple. Or are they? Both give the other what they have never had before. Do you think this relationship might continue? If so, how?
5. Who is Miss Lily? It is easy to classify her according to today’s mores. But Miss Lily does not give herself such a simple description. Lily and Nigel both exist — and give each other the space to exist, as well. They both love, and in different ways. They affect the world differently, too. Both would grieve deeply for the death of the other. Is Miss Lily unique, or do all of us have potential alternate egos — even if not so dramatically different as Miss Lily and Nigel’s? People that we could be, or would like to be, as well as who we are seen to be now?
6. Women’s roles — and the concept of what a woman is — has already changed dramatically in the Miss Lily books to date, and will do so even more as the series continues. How — in your own life, do you think women are still restricted by expectation, deprived of chances because they are female?

