



## Lilac Girls: A Novel

By Martha Hall Kelly

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**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • For readers of *The Nightingale* and *Sarah's Key*, inspired by the life of a real World War II heroine, this remarkable debut novel reveals the power of unsung women to change history in their quest for love, freedom, and second chances.**

New York socialite Caroline Ferriday has her hands full with her post at the French consulate and a new love on the horizon. But Caroline's world is forever changed when Hitler's army invades Poland in September 1939—and then sets its sights on France.

An ocean away from Caroline, Kasia Kuzmerick, a Polish teenager, senses her carefree youth disappearing as she is drawn deeper into her role as courier for the underground resistance movement. In a tense atmosphere of watchful eyes and suspecting neighbors, one false move can have dire consequences.

For the ambitious young German doctor, Herta Oberheuser, an ad for a government medical position seems her ticket out of a desolate life. Once hired, though, she finds herself trapped in a male-dominated realm of Nazi secrets and power.

The lives of these three women are set on a collision course when the unthinkable happens and Kasia is sent to Ravensbrück, the notorious Nazi concentration camp for women. Their stories cross continents—from New York to Paris, Germany, and Poland—as Caroline and Kasia strive to bring justice to those whom history has forgotten.

**USA Today “New and Noteworthy” Book • LibraryReads Top Ten Pick**

“Harrowing . . . *Lilac* illuminates.”—*People*

“A compelling, page-turning narrative . . . *Lilac Girls* falls squarely into the groundbreaking category of fiction that re-examines history from a fresh, female point of view. It's smart, thoughtful and also just an old-fashioned good read.”—*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

“A powerful story for readers everywhere . . . Martha Hall Kelly has brought

readers a firsthand glimpse into one of history's most frightening memories. A novel that brings to life what these women and many others suffered. . . . I was moved to tears.”—*San Francisco Book Review*

“Extremely moving and memorable . . . This impressive debut should appeal strongly to historical fiction readers and to book clubs that adored Kristin Hannah's *The Nightingale* and Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*.”—*Library Journal* (starred review)

“[A] compelling first novel . . . This is a page-turner demonstrating the tests and triumphs civilians faced during war, complemented by Kelly's vivid depiction of history and excellent characters.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Kelly vividly re-creates the world of Ravensbrück.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Inspired by actual events and real people, Martha Hall Kelly has woven together the stories of three women during World War II that reveal the bravery, cowardice, and cruelty of those days. This is a part of history—women's history—that should never be forgotten.”—*Lisa See, New York Times* bestselling author of *China Dolls*

“Profound, unsettling, and thoroughly . . . the best book I've read all year.”—*Jamie Ford, New York Times* bestselling author of *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*

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### **Lilac Girls: A Novel By Martha Hall Kelly Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #3166 in Books
- Brand: Ballantine Books
- Published on: 2016-04-05
- Released on: 2016-04-05
- Format: Deckle Edge
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.50" h x 1.50" w x 6.80" l, 1.25 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 496 pages

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## Editorial Review

### Review

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“This is the kind of book I wish I had the courage to write—a profound, unsettling, and thoroughly captivating look at sisterhood through the dark lens of the Holocaust. *Lilac Girls* is the best book I’ve read all year. It will haunt you.”—**Jamie Ford, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet***

“Rich with historical detail and riveting to the end, *Lilac Girls* weaves the lives of three astonishing women into a story of extraordinary moral power set against the harrowing backdrop of Europe in thrall to Nazi Germany. Martha Hall Kelly moves effortlessly across physical and ethical battlegrounds, across the trajectory of a doomed wartime romance, across the territory of the soul. I can’t remember the last time I read a novel that moved me so deeply.”—**Beatriz Williams, *New York Times* bestselling author of *A Hundred Summers* and *The Secret Life of Violet Grant***

### About the Author

**Martha Hall Kelly** is a native New Englander now living in Atlanta, Georgia, where she’s writing the prequel to *Lilac Girls*. This is her first novel.

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Chapter 1

Caroline

September 1939

If I'd known I was about to meet the man who'd shatter me like bone china on terra-cotta, I would have slept in. Instead, I roused our florist, Mr. Sitwell, from his bed to make a boutonnière. My first consulate gala was no time to stand on ceremony.

I joined the riptide of the great unwashed moving up Fifth Avenue. Men in gray-felted fedoras pushed by me, the morning papers in their attachés bearing the last benign headlines of the decade. There was no storm gathering in the east that day, no portent of things to come. The only ominous sign from the direction of Europe was the scent of slack water wafting off the East River.

As I neared our building at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-ninth Street, I felt Roger watching from the window above. He'd fired people for a lot less than being twenty minutes late, but the one time of year the New York elite opened their wallets and pretended they cared about France was no time for skimpy boutonnières.

I turned at the corner, the morning sun alive in the gold-leaf letters chiseled in the cornerstone: la maison française. The French Building, home to the French Consulate, stood side by side with the British Empire Building, facing Fifth Avenue, part of Rockefeller Center, Junior Rockefeller's new complex of granite and limestone. Many foreign consulates kept offices there then, resulting in a great stew of international diplomacy.

"All the way to the back and face the front," said Cuddy, our elevator operator.

Mr. Rockefeller handpicked the elevator boys, screening for manners and good looks. Cuddy was heavy on the looks, though his hair was already salt-and-peppered, his body in a hurry to age.

Cuddy fixed his gaze on the illuminated numbers above the doors. "You got a crowd up there today, Miss Ferriday. Pia said there's two new boats in."

"Delightful," I said.

Cuddy brushed something off the sleeve of his navy-blue uniform jacket. "Another late one tonight?"

For the fastest elevators in the world, ours still took forever. "I'll be gone by five. Gala tonight."

I loved my job. Grandmother Woolsey had started the work tradition in our family, nursing soldiers on the battlefield at Gettysburg. But my volunteer post as head of family assistance for the French Consulate wasn't work really. Loving all things French was simply genetic for me. My father may have been half-Irish, but his heart belonged to France. Plus, Mother had inherited an apartment in Paris, where we spent every August, so I felt at home there.

The elevator stopped. Even through the closed doors, we could hear a terrific din of raised voices. A shiver ran through me.

"Third floor," Cuddy called out. "French Consulate. Watch your—"

Once the doors parted, the noise overpowered all polite speech. The hallway outside our reception area was packed so tightly with people one could scarcely step through. Both the Normandie and the Ile de France, two of France's premier ocean liners, had landed that morning in New York Harbor, packed with wealthy passengers fleeing the uncertainty in France. Once the all-clear horn signaled and they were free to disembark, the ships' elite streamed to the consulate to iron out visa problems and other sticky issues.

I squeezed into the smoky reception area, past ladies in Paris's newest day dresses who stood gossiping in a lovely cloud of Arpège, the sea spray still in their hair. The people in this group were accustomed to being shadowed by a butler with a crystal ashtray and a champagne flute. Bellboys in scarlet jackets from the Normandie went toe-to-toe with their black-jacketed counterparts from the Ile de France. I wedged one shoulder through the crowd, toward our secretary's desk at the back of the room, and my chiffon scarf snagged on the clasp of one ravishing creature's pearls. As I worked to extract it, the intercom buzzed unanswered.

Roger.

I pressed on through, felt a pat on my behind, and turned to see a midshipman flash a plaquy smile.

"Gardons nos mains pour nous-mêmes," I said. Let's keep our hands to ourselves.

The boy raised his arm above the crowd and dangled his Normandie stateroom key. At least he wasn't the over-sixty type I usually attracted.

I made it to our secretary's desk, where she sat, head down, typing.

"Bonjour, Pia."

Roger's cousin, a sloe-eyed boy of eighteen, was sitting on Pia's desk, legs crossed. He held his cigarette in the air as he picked through a box of chocolates, Pia's favorite breakfast. My inbox on her desk was already stacked with case folders.

"Vraiment? What is so good about it?" she said, not lifting her head.

Pia was much more than a secretary. We all wore many hats, and hers included signing in new clients and establishing a folder for each, typing up Roger's considerable correspondence, and deciphering the massive flood of daily Morse-code pulses that was the lifeblood of our office.

"Why is it so hot in here?" I said. "The phone is ringing, Pia."

She plucked a chocolate from the box. "It keeps doing that."

Pia attracted beaux as if she emitted a frequency only males could detect. She was attractive in a feral way, but I suspected her popularity was due in part to her tight sweaters.

"Can you take some of my cases today, Pia?"

"Roger says I can't leave this chair." She broke the shell of the chocolate's underside with her manicured thumb, stalking the strawberry crèmes. "He also wants to see you right away, but I think the woman on the sofa slept in the hallway last night." Pia flapped one half of a one-hundred-dollar bill at me. "And the fatty

with the dogs says he'll give you the other half if you take him first." She nodded toward the well-fed older couple near my office door, each holding a brace of gray-muzzled dachshunds.

Like Pia's, my job description was wide-ranging. It included attending to the needs of French citizens here in New York—often families fallen on hard times—and overseeing my French Families Fund, a charity effort through which I sent comfort boxes to French orphans overseas. I'd just retired from an almost two-decade-long stint on Broadway, and this felt easy by comparison. It certainly involved less unpacking of trunks.

My boss, Roger Fortier, appeared in his office doorway.

"Caroline, I need you now. Bonnet's canceled."

"You can't be serious, Roger." The news came like a punch. I'd secured the French foreign minister as our gala keynote speaker months before.

"It's not easy being the French foreign minister right now," he called over his shoulder as he went back inside.

I stepped into my office and flipped through the Wheeldex on my desk. Was Mother's Buddhist-monk friend Ajahn Chah free that night?

"Caroline—" Roger called. I grabbed my Wheeldex and hurried to his office, avoiding the couple with the dachshunds, who were trying their best to look tragic.

"Why were you late this morning?" Roger asked. "Pia's been here for two hours already."

As consul general, Roger Fortier ruled from the corner suite with its commanding view of Rockefeller Plaza and the Promenade Cafe. Normally the famous skating rink occupied that sunken spot, but the rink was closed for the summer, the space now filled with café tables and tuxedoed waiters rushing about with aprons to their ankles. Beyond, Paul Manship's massive golden Prometheus fell to earth, holding his stolen fire aloft. Behind it, the RCA Building shot up seventy floors into the sapphire sky. Roger had a lot in common with the imposing male figure of Wisdom chiseled above the building's entrance. The furrowed brow. The beard. The angry eyes.

"I stopped for Bonnet's boutonniere—"

"Oh, that's worth keeping half of France waiting." Roger bit into a doughnut, and powdered sugar cascaded down his beard. Despite what might kindly be called a husky figure, he was never at a loss for female companions.

His desk was heaped with folders, security documents, and dossiers on missing French citizens. According to the French Consulate Handbook, his job was "to assist French nationals in New York, in the event of theft, serious illness, or arrest and with issues related to birth certificates, adoption, and lost or stolen documents; to plan visits of French officials and fellow diplomats; and to assist with political difficulties and natural disasters." The troubles in Europe provided plenty of work for us in all those categories, if you counted Hitler as a natural disaster.

"I have cases to get back to, Roger—"



He sent a manila folder skidding across the polished conference table. “Not only do we have no speaker; I was up half the night rewriting Bonnet’s speech. Had to sidestep Roosevelt letting France buy American planes.”

“France should be able to buy all the planes they want.”

“We’re raising money here, Caroline. It’s not the time to annoy the isolationists. Especially the rich ones.”

“They don’t support France anyway.”

“We don’t need any more bad press. Is the U.S. too cozy with France? Will that push Germany and Russia closer? I can barely finish a third course without being interrupted by a reporter. And we can’t mention the Rockefellers .??. Don’t want another call from Junior. Guess that’ll happen anyway now that Bonnet canceled.”

“It’s a disaster, Roger.”

“May need to scrap the whole thing.” Roger raked his long fingers through his hair, digging fresh trenches through the Brylcreem.

“Refund forty thousand dollars? What about the French Families Fund? I’m already operating on fumes. Plus, we’ve paid for ten pounds of Waldorf salad—”

“They call that salad?” Roger flipped through his contact cards, half of them illegible and littered with cross-outs. “It’s pathetic .??. just chopped apples and celery. And those soggy walnuts .??.”

I scoured my Wheeldex in search of celebrity candidates. Mother and I knew Julia Marlowe, the famous actress, but she was touring Europe. “How about Peter Patout? Mother’s people have used him.”

“The architect?”

“Of the whole World’s Fair. They have that seven-foot robot.”

“Boring,” he said, slapping his silver letter opener against his palm.

I flipped to the L’s. “How about Captain Lehide?”

“Of the Normandie? Are you serious? He’s paid to be dull.”

“You can’t just discount every suggestion out of hand, Roger. How about Paul Rodierre? Betty says everyone’s talking about him.”

Roger pursed his lips, always a good sign. “The actor? I saw his new play in previews. He’s good. Tall and attractive, if you go for that look. Fast metabolism, of course.”

“At least we know he can memorize a script.”

“He’s a bit of a loose cannon. And married too, so don’t get any ideas.”

“I’m through with men, Roger,” I said. At thirty-seven, I’d resigned myself to singledom.

“Not sure Rodierre’ll do it. See who you can get, but make sure they stick to the script. No Roosevelt—”

“No Rockefellers,” I finished.

Between cases, I called around to various last-minute possibilities, ending up with one option, Paul Rodierre. He was in New York appearing in a new American musical revue at the Broadhurst Theatre, *The Streets of Paris*, Carmen Miranda’s cyclonic Broadway debut.

I phoned the William Morris Agency and was told they’d check and call me back. Ten minutes later, M. Rodierre’s agent told me the theater was dark that night and that, though his client did not own evening clothes, he was deeply honored by our request to host the gala that evening. He’d meet me at the Waldorf to discuss details. Our apartment on East Fiftieth Street was a stone’s throw from the Waldorf, so I rushed there to change into Mother’s black Chanel dress.

I found M. Rodierre seated at a café table in the Waldorf’s Peacock Alley bar adjacent to the lobby as the two-ton bronze clock sounded its lovely Westminster Cathedral chime on the half hour. Gala guests in their finest filtered in, headed for the Grand Ballroom upstairs.

“M. Rodierre?” I said.

Roger was right about the attractive part. The first thing a person notices about Paul Rodierre, after the initial jolt of his physical beauty, is the remarkable smile.

“How can I thank you for doing this so last minute, Monsieur?”

He unfolded himself from his chair, presenting a build better suited to rowing crew on the Charles than playing Broadway. He attempted to kiss my cheek, but I extended my hand to him, and he shook it. It was nice to meet a man my height.

“My pleasure,” he said.

His attire was the issue: green trousers, an aubergine velvet sports jacket, brown suede shoes, and worst of all, a black shirt. Only priests and fascists wore black shirts. And gangsters, of course.

“Do you want to change?” I resisted the urge to tidy his hair, which was long enough to pull back with a rubber band. “Shave perhaps?” According to his agent, M. Rodierre was a guest at the hotel, so his razor sat just a few stories overhead.

“This is what I wear,” he said with a shrug. Typical actor. Why hadn’t I known better? The parade of guests en route to the ballroom was growing, the women stunning in their finery, every man in tails and patent leather oxfords or calf opera pumps.

“This is my first gala,” I said. “The consulate’s one night to raise money. It’s white tie.” Would he fit into Father’s old tux? The inseam would be right, but it would be much too tight in the shoulders.

“Are you always this, well, energized, Miss Ferriday?”

“Well, here in New York, individuality is not always appreciated.” I handed him the stapled sheets. “I’m sure you’re eager to see the script.”

He handed it back. “No, merci.”

I pushed it back into his hands. “But the consul general himself wrote it.”

“Tell me again why I’m doing this?”

“It’s to benefit displaced French citizens all year and my French Families Fund. We help orphans back in France whose parents have been lost for any number of reasons. With all the uncertainty abroad, we’re one reliable source of clothes and food. Plus, the Rockefellers will be there tonight.”

He paged through the speech. “They could write a check and avoid this whole thing.”

“They’re among our kindest donors, but please don’t refer to them. Or President Roosevelt. Or the planes the U.S. sold France. Some of our guests tonight love France, of course, but would rather stay out of a war for now. Roger wants to avoid controversy.”

“Dancing around things never feels authentic. The audience feels that.”

“Can you just stick to the script, Monsieur?”

“Worrying can lead to heart failure, Miss Ferriday.”

I pulled the pin from the lily of the valley. “Here—a boutonnière for the guest of honor.”

“Muguet?” M. Rodierre said. “Where did you find that this time of year?”

“You can get anything in New York. Our florist forces it from pips.”

I rested my palm against his lapel and dug the pin deep into the French velvet. Was that lovely fragrance from him or the flowers? Why didn’t American men smell like this, of tuberose and wood musk and—

“You know lily of the valley is poisonous, right?” M. Rodierre said.

“So don’t eat it. At least not until you’ve finished speaking. Or if the crowd turns on you.”

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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Now a day individuals who Living in the era wherever everything reachable by match the internet and the resources in it can be true or not require people to be aware of each data they get. How many people to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the solution is reading a book. Looking at a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information especially this Lilac Girls: A Novel book since this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the data in this book hundred per-cent guarantees there is no doubt in it everybody knows.

**Jamie Arellano:**

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their down time with their family, or all their friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book can be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the guide untitled Lilac Girls: A Novel can be great book to read. May be it may be best activity to you.

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**Daryl Radford:**

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