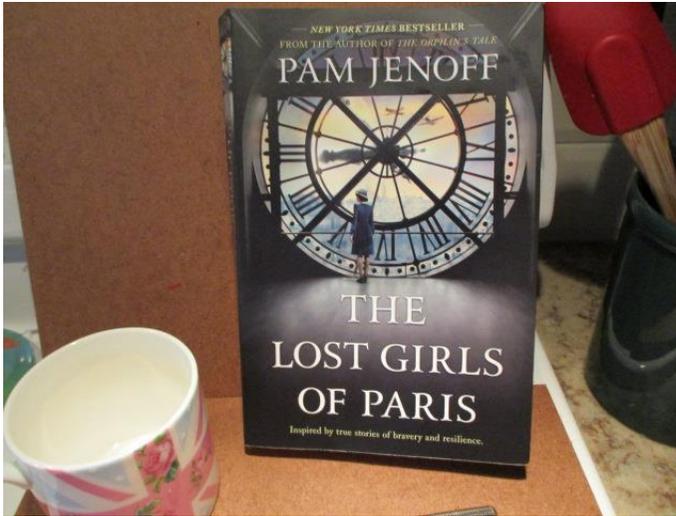


# The Lost Girls of Paris

By Rod Fraser

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This book was recommended by Don, a friend and luncheon companion, who always manages to suggest a good novel whenever we get together. He gets his ideas from *The Globe and Mail* book section, which he carefully peruses each week.

Don is great company. We sit at the *Pantry Shelf* after a tasty lunch, sipping our lattés and chatting for hours about all kinds of topics,

Books are always discussed: new ones recently printed and old favorites. Don tends to like mystery stories, but he surprises me sometimes with a new

title. Such is the case with *The Lost Girls of Paris*. He told me the first half was interesting enough, but once he was into it, he was hooked. He stayed up until the wee hours to finish it. Now that is a recommendation I can get behind.

The author is a young woman, Pam Jenoff, who has three children and as many university degrees. She got the idea for the story from "working at the Pentagon, and also as a diplomat for the State Department, handling Holocaust issues in Poland".

It seems to make sense. *The Lost Girls of Paris* is a World War II novel of female secret agents, the German occupation of France, wartime London and "friendship, valor and betrayal".



The idea of female secret agents evolved during the war years when it became clear that young male agents were too visible in occupied France, too susceptible to capture or arrest.

Most young Frenchmen in France were "gone from the cities and towns. Conscripted to the LVF, off fighting for the Vichy collaborationist militia or imprisoned for refusing to do so," those who remained were noticed, often questioned and detained by the authorities. If agents could not give a good account of themselves, they were arrested,

incarcerated or shot.

This put male agents at considerable risk. Their inability to blend in with the civilian population made their jobs as couriers, radio operators and saboteurs difficult, if not impossible. What was to be done?



Eleanor Trigg, a woman originally hired as a secretary in a British organization set up by Churchill to “set Europe ablaze through sabotage and subversion” has risen through hard work and competence to become a key advisor to its Director.

With so many male secret agents captured by the Germans, Eleanor proposes something new. Why not recruit female agents, give them the same training as men and send them to France to do the jobs that men had done in the past? They would fit in better with the civilian population, avoid capture and be as every bit as competent as men in many of the clandestine operations.

She is put in charge of the women’s division and sets about to train female agents to be inserted into France in advance of the invasion. The story focuses on two such agents, Marie and Josie.

Leaving aside the feminist tilt to the novel, it is a good story. As the novel progresses, it is clear that Jenoff also writes effectively about male agents in

the field. The collaboration between the sexes is a part of this story that works extremely well.



The novel is told by three separate narrators. Eleanor tells her story of training and placing the female agents and her concerns for their welfare. Later she is pivotal in investigating what happened to many of these same agents shortly after the end of the war.

Marie Roux is another narrator to the story. Although not as strong as some of her peers in her training, she qualifies as an agent, and is placed in France just prior to the invasion. Her role is to help with the demolition of a bridge that will stop German tanks from rushing to the front on D-Day. She performs brilliantly, but unfortunately is captured and sent to a concentration camp.

The third narrator is an American woman, Grace Healey, who lives in New York. She becomes aware of this spy network after the war. For a variety of reasons, she decides to investigate its creation, who was involved and what happened to its participants.



The story starts in 1946 when Grace learns of Eleanor Trigg's death and decides to find out all

about her. Then the chapters flip back and forth between Grace in 1946, Eleanor throughout the war years and Marie during her training and her spy activities in France in 1944.

It is effective story telling at its best. Like my friend, Don, I couldn't put the book down once I became acquainted with the characters and the war time action in France began.

Of all the characters in the story, I found Marie the most compelling. She was a mother of a young girl, who hired on as a secret agent, primarily so she could provide financially for her daughter.

She wasn't a strong women or naturally gifted with the skills required of an agent in the field. But she had resolve and tenacity. Sociologists tell us that innate cognitive ability and conscientiousness are two keys for success in most fields. I was reminded of this when I read about Marie's exploits in France, capture and eventual escape. It is simply a great story.

So all in all, I recommend this book for those who love to read stories during the cold months of the year. Turn up the heat, warm up your coffee and the pages will turn by themselves. Try it. You'll see.

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