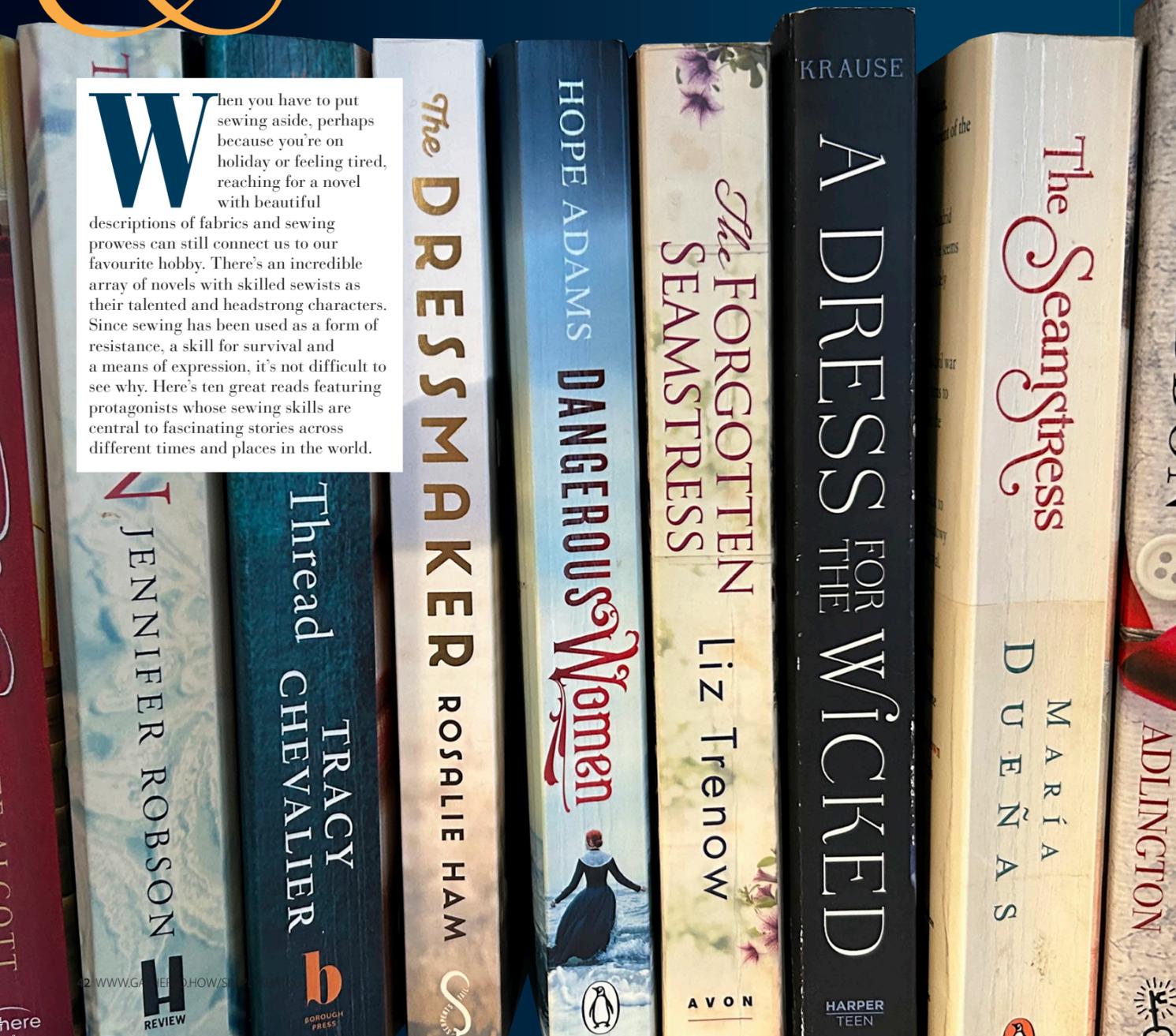


Stories of needle & thread

We share our favourite novels threaded with dressmaking, history and drama

Written by Michelle Rowley

When you have to put sewing aside, perhaps because you're on holiday or feeling tired, reaching for a novel with beautiful descriptions of fabrics and sewing prowess can still connect us to our favourite hobby. There's an incredible array of novels with skilled sewists as their talented and headstrong characters. Since sewing has been used as a form of resistance, a skill for survival and a means of expression, it's not difficult to see why. Here's ten great reads featuring protagonists whose sewing skills are central to fascinating stories across different times and places in the world.



THE DRESSMAKER

By Kate Alcott

Alcott weaves a tale of ambition and creativity, set against the tragic backdrop of the Titanic disaster and its aftermath. The story follows Tess Collins, an aspiring seamstress who dreams of a career in couture. Tess embarks on an adventure as the personal maid to the famous designer Lady Lucile Duff Gordon aboard the Titanic. Rescued separately, they are reunited in New York, where fiery Lady Gordon allows Tess to sew for her new collection. Tess's dream is in her grasp but rumours concerning her mentor's actions aboard the Titanic leave her with a moral dilemma. Enjoy the descriptions of haute couture and Tess's stunning designs.

THE FORGOTTEN SEAMSTRESS

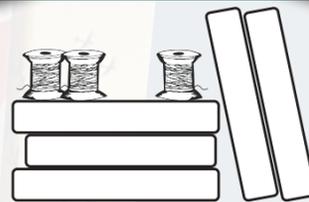
By Liz Trenow

Do not judge this book by its cover! This story will appeal to both dressmakers and quilters, as although the protagonist, Maria, is a dressmaker, it is the quilt she stitched which is central to the telling of her story. The story is carefully pieced together, in the same way as the mysterious quilt, to reveal a royal scandal, secrets, and the tragic life of Maria, a former royal seamstress. It reminds us how sewing can be used to record and reveal stories which can live on long after ourselves. I enjoyed listening to the audiobook of this story (whilst sewing!), as all the different characters are well

THE DRESSMAKER

By Rosalie Ham

Couture meets revenge in this gothic-tale about Tilly Dunnage (played by Kate Winslet in the film adaptation), a phenomenal dressmaker with an incredible back story. After working as a courtier for the Paris fashion houses, Tilly returns to her hometown in rural Australia to take care of her mother, having left the town years ago under suspicion and disgrace. It takes Tilly's exceptional dressmaking skills for the suspicious locals to slowly start accepting her again. However, after using Tilly for her incredible talent, the people turn on her again, setting Tilly on the dark path to retribution. The story is dark, but anyone interested in 1950s fashion will love the descriptions of the dresses Tilly sews, whilst smiling knowingly at the unrealistic time in which she sews them!



A DRESS FOR THE WICKED

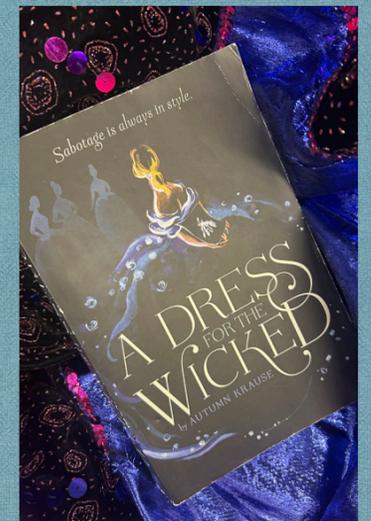
By Autumn Krause

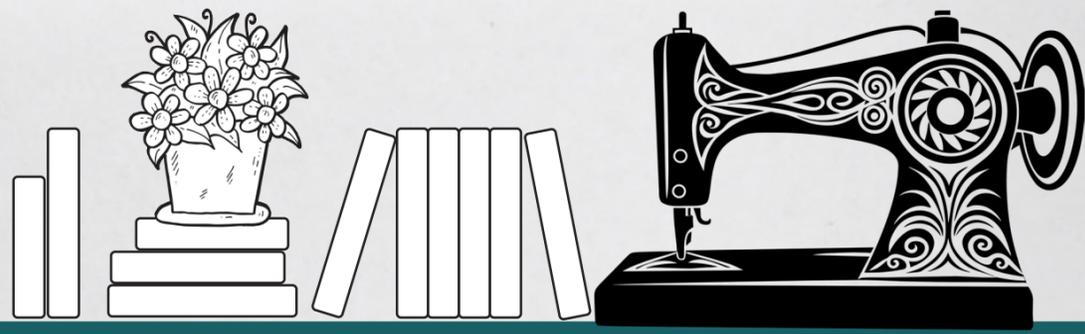
In an alternate Victorian England, Emmaline dreams of joining the fashion world's elite and earning a spot at the prestigious Fashion House. But in a society where talent isn't enough, Emmaline must navigate rivalries and societal expectations in which "sabotage is always in style." Bursting with ambition, style, and drama, this novel is for anyone who loves fashion contests like Project Runway. Its fantasy setting and elements make it completely different to the other books in this list.

DANGEROUS WOMEN

By Hope Adams

This one's for the quilters amongst us, or anyone who loves historical fiction based on real life events. Hope Adams was inspired to write this book after seeing the Rajah quilt, which was sewn aboard a convict ship bound for Australia in 1841 under the direction of Kezia Hayter, a volunteer reformer. The novel follows Kezia and a group of women prisoners as they work together on the quilt. We follow their physical and personal transformative journeys as the quilt-making forms friendships and unveils secrets. Oh and there's a murderer on board.



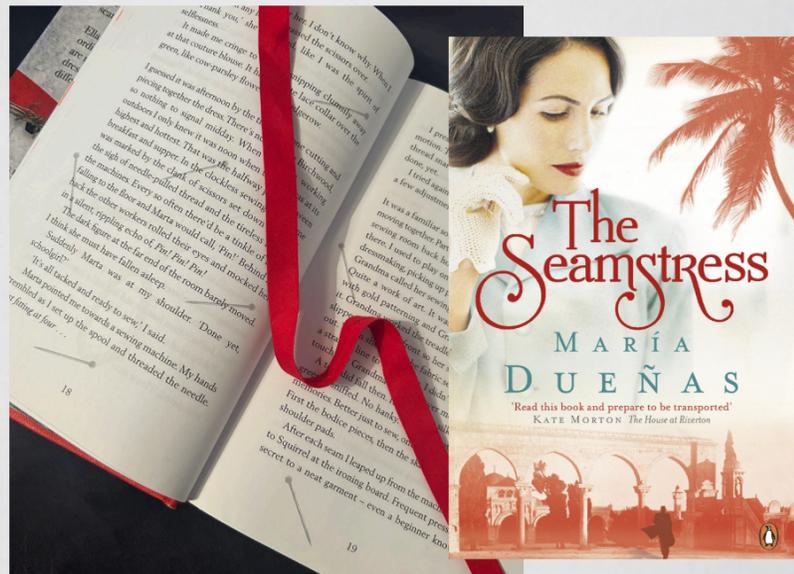
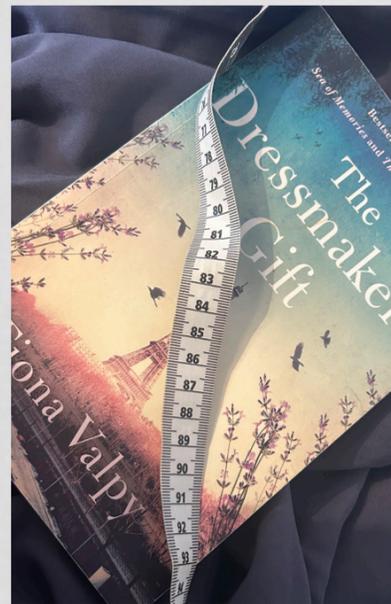


STORIES OF SEWING FOR RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL DURING WORLD WAR II

THE DRESSMAKER'S GIFT

by Fiona Valpy

A beautiful description of a silk dress, sewn from off-cuts, in a Parisian Museum opens this novel, which intertwines the lives of three seamstresses working in Paris during World War II with a modern-day narrative of self-discovery. The seamstresses at the couture fashion house use their sewing skills both as a means of survival and a form of resistance as they navigate the perils of Nazi-occupied Paris. Years later, after securing a job at a fashion agency, in the very building that her grandmother worked in, Claire sets out to discover the truth about her grandmother's life and those of her friends. The book explores female friendships and relationships, weaving their stories of resilience and bravery together to give a detailed insight of life in Paris under Nazi occupation. You'll love this book if you like historical detail and the world of couture.



THE RED RIBBON

By Lucy Adlington

This Young Adult novel, written by costume historian and novelist Lucy Adlington, tells the story of 14-year-old Ella, a Jewish girl imprisoned in Birkenau-Auschwitz who becomes a seamstress for the Nazi wives. Descriptions of the fabric she uses for their dresses offer a stark contrast to the descriptions of the horror and atrocity occurring around Ella. Despite dealing with an ugly subject matter, it's a beautiful book in both story and presentation. The red ribbon of the title is a gift of hope, which not only weaves its way through the story but also across the printed pages of the hardback edition alongside scissors, buttons and needles.

THE SEAMSTRESS

By María Dueñas

Sira Quiroga abandons her seamstress life in Madrid to flee to Morocco with a new lover, who betrays her and leaves her penniless. Unable to return to a Spain now engulfed by civil war, she uses her sewing skills to rebuild her life. Sira finds herself embroiled in the world of WWII espionage as she uses her dressmaking skills to hide secret codes and more. I enjoyed the various place settings within the novel, which has also been published under the title *The Time in Between* (a translation of the original Spanish version). There's a fantastic Spanish Netflix series of the same name, which I highly recommend watching for Sira's incredible wardrobe alone.

Sewing has been used as a form of resistance, survival and expression



EMBROIDERED TALES

THE GOWN

By Jennifer Robson

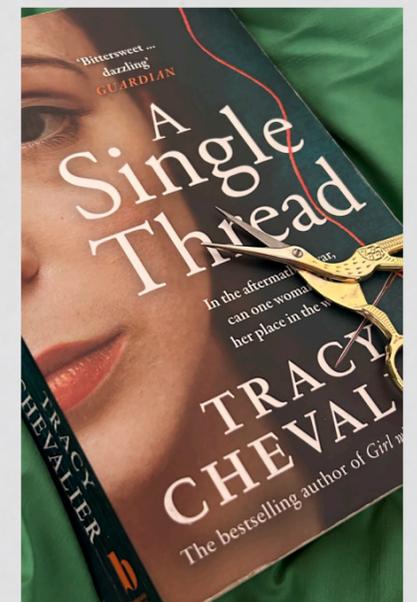
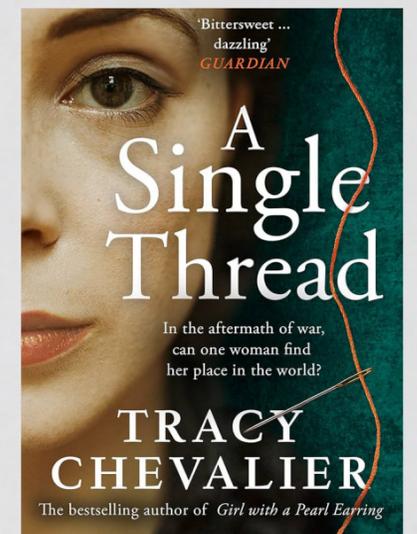
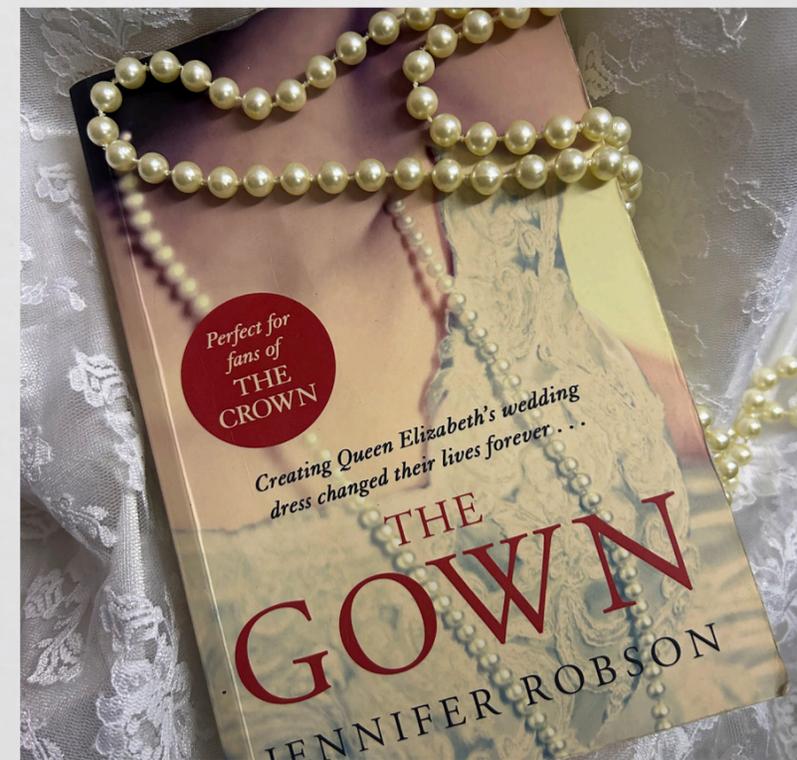
Set in post-war London, this novel tells the story of Ann Hughes and Miriam Dassin, embroiderers working for the legendary Mayfair fashion designer Norman Hartnell. Readers are transported to the workroom as one of the world's most famous wedding gowns is lovingly stitched: Queen Elizabeth II's. With skill, dedication, and friendship, the women stitch dreams and secrets into every delicate embellishment. It's the perfect read for fashion history lovers.

A SINGLE THREAD

By Tracy Chevalier

In 1930s England, Violet Speedwell, having lost her fiancé to the war, decides to leave home and start a new life in Winchester. She becomes drawn to the society of broderers, a group of women who embroider the cushions and kneelers for the famed cathedral. For Violet, the needlework becomes a path to self-worth after years of living with her domineering mother. Like many of the novels on this list, *A Single Thread* reminds us how sew something of ourselves into a creation can leave a legacy.

Reach for a novel about sewing prowess to connect to your favourite hobby



Michelle (she/her) is a content writer and dressmaking tutor with a love of fashion history. She lives in the Northwest with her family. See more @stitchywhitney