



The Darkest Hour

Barbara Erskine

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From the Sunday Times bestselling author comes an epic tale of love, passion and heartbreak.

Love is as uncertain and as untameable as war...

In the summer of 1940, most eyes are focused on the skies above the South of England. The battle for Britain has just begun. But young Evie Lucas has eyes for no-one but a dashing young pilot called Tony. Evie has a glittering career as an artist ahead of her but seems to be wasting her time sketching endless portraits of Tony. She wants his parents to have something to remember him by in case it all goes wrong in the war...

Seventy years later, and recently widowed art historian Lucy is trying to put the pieces of her life back together. And in order to do that, Lucy needs to uncover the mystery surrounding a painting in her home. But as she accidentally ends up stirring up a hornet's nest of history which has been deliberately obliterated, Lucy finds herself in danger from people past and present who have no intention of letting an untold truth ever surface.

The Darkest Hour Details

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From Reader Review The Darkest Hour for online ebook

Huw Rhys says

This was an interesting enough read - in some parts.

It is a Romantic Ghost story, set both in the near present and then shifting back in time to the Second World War. Or a romance, with a few ghosts in it, who've been around since the Second World War.

The historical story is quite interesting - the modern day one not quite so. The ghost bit - well, on one level - sensible cynical head on, it is pretty far fetched I'm afraid. However, put a more "creative" head on, see it as maybe metaphor, or see it as how the mind can play tricks when the mind is not in a particularly stable state, and it can be quite thought provoking.

The Battle of Britain must have been a fairly traumatic time for those that lived through it. In this book, we have a family living in south east England, with much of the main "dogfight" action taking place above their heads - and there are brothers, lovers, sons and childhood friends flying some of those planes, with a life expectancy measured in hours and days rather than weeks and months.... so yes, without giving too much away, some of our poltergeists were pilots.

Then throw in to the mix a fiery young artist who just loves bucking convention, a bullying agent and would be suitor, a couple of jolly nice pilot types and a fairly dysfunctional family, and you have the makings of a ripping yarn.

70 or so years later, an art historian picks up many of the shattered pieces left behind by the travails of war, loose ends that have been flapping about in the ether for a few generations, and the story unfolds.

It's an interesting enough story, even if the modern day stuff does feel a little bit forced at times to try and make sense of some of the events of the 1940's.

What I found particularly interesting - and I'm not convinced that this was intended - was the ghostly element of the tale. Do we believe in the existence of things beyond our senses? Is there any reality in the supernatural? Read Barbara Erskine's website - she certainly thinks so, and spirits appear liberally throughout her work. But I choose the word "spirit" deliberately - maybe when we're mourning someone, when we're vulnerable and open to persuasion, maybe when we feel there's unfinished business - maybe we allow the spirit of someone whose physical body has passed on to influence us? That's one for you to ponder on... I've got to go now - a cold chill has suddenly set in here...

Kathy says

Barbara Erskine is a must read for me, and yes, I liked this one, but wouldn't say it is a Lady of Hay or Child of the Phoenix..... This 'ghost' story is set in present time and World War II. I found I quite enjoyed the storyline, but sometimes, because we go from one time period to the other quite often, it took me quite a way into the book to really get attached to the storyline. We were flicking around quite often which sometimes can be a bad thing because I felt I could put the book down more often and then come back to it, instead of wanting me to keep turning the pages.... In saying all that, I liked the characters and the storyline I

recommend to those who like the past/present novels set in war time.

Klér says

Dokonalá kniha!! :) Pokud máte p?fb?hy z druhé sv?tové války, napínavé p?fb?hy s originálním nápadem, tak tahle kniha bude p?ímo pro Vás :). Strašn? moc se mi to líbilo.. Knížka byla ?tivá, autor?in styl psaní jsem si p?ímo zamilovala a ke konci se mi cht?lo i bre?et. Za poslední dobu jsem poznala trochu jak m?že být život nespravedlivý n?kdy a tahle kniha m? o tom bohužel p?esv?d?la ješt? víc. Na knihu M?d?ný jezdec to u m? zdaleka nemá, ale pokud i vy jste tu knihu ?etli tak si rozhodn? p?e?t?te i tuto :)). Ur?it? se bude ?adit mezi nejlepší knihy za tento rok. Moc DOPORU?UJI!! :)

Andreea says

I liked this book and in general I like the mix of present and past events. Even better if there are secrets and mysteries involved :) But was it really necessary to bring up ghosts and vengeful spirits? I don't think this brought any pluses to the book...

Cathy says

I have always enjoyed Ms Erskine's books, but sadly, I was disappointed with 'The Darkest Hour'.

I felt that the storyline was very predictable (I kept reading in the hope I would be proved wrong, but I wasn't). Some of the characters were, in my opinion, superfluous e.g Charlotte and Robin, when others could have been explored at greater depth e.g Frances and Hannah.

Nor was it well edited (I found numerous spelling and grammatical errors) and some very jarring sentences e.g. The last thing he saw was the huge oak tree heading straight for him. Sadly, this statement was repeated several times.

Perhaps I am being picky, but I have come to expect so much more from Ms Erskine and this novel felt flat and disjointed.

One thing I will say, I was not expecting a 'happy ending' and I would have been even more disappointed if she had found a way to weave one in, but there were far to many lucky coincidences (used to move the plot forward) and they just didn't sit well with me.

Helene says

Disappointing... I think would be the word of choice.

The problem for me is Lady Of Hay, Kingdom Of Shadows, Child Of The Phoenix were so good, that I keep hoping for Barbara Erskine's new books to match them. They never quite do.

Spoilers

As a ghost story The Darkest Hour is enjoyable, the prologue and first few chapters had me engrossed and then it just fizzled away to nothing, the character depth that was in previous books was severely lacking in this one.

The plot line just felt flimsy and not really well thought out at all. By the middle of the book it was boring, repetitive and I just wanted it over.

The Threat (if you can call it that) wasn't even really that much of a threat, it never seemed to create the tension that the Lady Of Hay did.

its possible that was due to the writing style, instead of her characters regressing into their previous lives it was written as a ghost story. I prefer the regression type of writing.

But the whole book was severely lacking something. Not sure what, but it came over chocolate boxy and *war time* star crossed lovers type of romance that really I would prefer not to read.

Damaskcat says

I am not always too keen on books which have a World War II element but as this one is by Barbara Erskine – whose books I enjoy – I decided to read it anyway. I thoroughly enjoyed it and found myself totally absorbed in the story – both past and present. Lucy's husband has died in an unexplained car crash and shortly afterwards she hears she has received a grant to help her fund the research and writing of a biography of Evie Lucas – an almost forgotten war artist. Lucy became interested in the subject after her husband had bought a painting he believed to be by Evie.

Lucy's research leads her to Michael Marston, Evie's grandson, who now lives in what was Evie's cottage and which still contains many of her personal possessions. At first Michael is rather cool about the idea of a biography but gradually he warms to the idea and that is where the problems begin. Ghosts, both benevolent and malign, start appearing, Michael's girlfriend, Charlotte, shows herself in her true colours and people Lucy approaches in her research blow first hot and then cold. Where will it all end?

I found many of the scenes in this book extremely poignant – probably because they resonated with my personal circumstances and a recent loss. I found myself in tears over Lucy's grief for her husband and over Evie's love affair with Tony, the charming airman. I thought the supernatural elements were as ever very well done and I loved the way the strands of the stories were interwoven as more and more was gradually revealed of Evie's life. The evil people were convincingly evil and yet at the same time all too human.

I thought the characters were well drawn and the way they changed during the book was convincing and believable. I particularly liked Huw and his wife Maggie as well as Michael's mother, Juliette. The book as ever with this author, is well written and the research is meticulous. The World War II sections were excellent and really showed how the war affected ordinary people and made them do things they might never have considered in peacetime.

Barbara Erskine's many fans will love this book even though the historical elements are relatively recent. If you like time-slip books then give this one a try.

Rodaw says

Tato kniha se po do?tení stala mou nejmilejší knihou, což myslím celkem mluví za vše. Barbara Erskinová je má nejoblíben?jší spisovatelka a p?ed p?e?tením Nejtemn?jší hodiny jsem m?la na pomyslném 1.míst? Na pokraji temnoty, ovšem nyní, nemám slov. Knihu jsem ?etla, když jsem byla nemocná, celkem dva dny. V?era t?sn? p?ed p?lnocí jsem ji do?etla. Posledních 30 stránek ze m? tekly potoky slz. A to se mi ješt? nikdy nestalo. U dojemných knih jsem m?la vždy maximáln? slzy v o?ích, ale u Nejtemn?jší hodiny jsem doslova plakala, bre?ela, nemohla jsem tomu uv??it. V této knize je tak moc citlivý, krásný, nezapomenutelný, srdcervoucí p?íb?h. Je tu tak veliká nespravedlnost, se kterou jsem se nejspíš ješt? u žádné knihy nesetkala ... Barbara je mistrní svého žánru. Píše neuv??iteln? ?iv? a poutav? a všechny knihy, které napsala, miluju. Ovšem nepopíram, že tahle kniha mi zlomila srdce. Když jsem ji do?etla, vrátila jsem se zpátky k mým oblíbeným scénám a pasážím- p?edevším kde byl Tony a Ralph, protože tito dva kluci se za?adili k mým nejmilejším postavám všech dob :-) Byli neuv??itelní, oba dva. Zamilovala jsem si je. Bylo hodn? smutné ?ít ty pasáže znova, když víte, jak celý p?íb?h dopadne. A jsme op?t u té nespravedlnosti a zrady, nenávisti, která vedla až za hrob.

Jak už jsem psala- knihu jsem do?etla t?sn? p?ed p?lnocí, ale pak jsem nemohla usnout. Takovou noc jsem ješt? nezažila. P?evalovala jsem se v posteli, bre?ela, celý p?íb?h si p?ehrávala znova a znova a moc jsem cht?la, abych si s Ralphem a Tonym mohla na chvíli popovídat- abych jim ?ekla, jak moc m? jejich p?íb?h zasáhl.. Opravdu, n?co takového se mi ješt? NIKDY po do?tení knihy nestalo, TAK MOC M? ZASÁHLA. V noci jsem se pak po?ád budila a nad p?íb?hem p?emýšlela. Dneska to není o nic lepší, stále se k p?íb?hu vracím a p?emýslím nad ním... Knížku ?etla i má mamka a má na ni stejný názor jako já. Také ji neuv??iteln? moc zasáhl. Dnes jsme si spolu o knize dlouho povídaly a já se znova rozplakala. Tato kniha je jedine?ná. Vím jist?, že se k ní budu vracet a že na ni nikdy nezapomenu. Prosím p?e?t?te si ji. Tento strhující p?íb?h by m?l poznat každý. A až knížku budete ?ít, pozdravujte ode m? Ralha a Tonyho ♥ :-)

Emma says

Very unusually for me, I've only given this three stars If you know Barbara Erskine's work then you'll know they are all time slip type novels where events from the past merge into the present day. I have loved her work for years and it's a genre she writes particularly well.

The narrative flowed easily between the two time frames, that of the 1940s Battle of Britain and the present day. It centres around the life of an emerging war artist Evelyn Lucas and her love affair with a young spitfire pilot. In the present day Lucy, a widowed art historian (and owner of one of Evelyn's paintings) has been commissioned to write her biography. As she starts to research the artist's life it becomes clear that

there is a good deal of family opposition to the project, but not only that, Lucy seems to be the focus for the ghosts from the past who are also desperate to be heard. There are obviously quite a few skeletons in this family's cupboard!

At the start the story moves along well, with the tension building nicely, and just enough sinister happenings to keep the pages turning. However, for me the middle section seemed overly long, and for a while although Lucy was uncovering more information bit by bit, it didn't seem to be going anywhere. It might be that I didn't manage to read this book quickly enough, but in itself that it unusual for me. I liked Lucy and the modern day characters, but found that I didn't really like Evelyn that much, and felt that some of the characters actions didn't quite fit. Again, perhaps it was just my reading of it at this time.

The ending was satisfying, and brought together the threads of the plot, and as with all Barbara's works, a bit of romance gets thrown in too.

Judi Mckay says

This is the last Erskine I intend to read (unless I find some early ones on my bookshelf). I used to love her books but this falls short of her previously high standard. It was rambling, badly edited, too long and didn't work for me. All her books involve some element of ghosts or supernatural in them - this one too- this time the ghosts were people who'd known each other in WW2. But when I found out who they are and why they've returned from beyond the grave I found I didn't much care and didn't believe the scenario.

The book jumped from now to the 1940s and back in very short extracts which made it feel fragmented. While some of the descriptions of the Battle of Britain were very evocative, overall I didn't get the sense of really being in the 1940s during these parts of the narrative.

If you have never read Erskine before, read Lady of Hay or one of her early novels. They are brilliant. This one lacks depth and believeability. She should have quit while she was ahead instead of continuing to turn out books which are less and less good and overall, in my view, damaging to her reputation.

Tara says

The characters are extremely one-dimensional, there are numerous gratuitous characters that serve no purpose at all (does she not have an editor??) and there are genuinely no likeable characters. The ending was largely predictable and Unsatisfying. It's grossly inconsistent with the character's previous actions and there was no character growth that would have brought them to this end place.

The story could have been quite interesting, but it just wasn't.

Toast says

Dark and complicated this one. But another smooth BE book written in tribute to WW11 veterans including her father. Maybe I've read to many of her's lately or maybe its more personal to her or because it WW11 but it has a different tone to her others - darker, more earnest, more to prove - I don't know. It just read differently and I'm not sure words like like or dislike apply.

Toast

Cynthia Green says

Barbara Erskine is one of my favourite writers and I always look forward to her novels. When I heard, last year, that her new book's past story was set during WWII I was not impressed. I've come to love her historical heroines who reach out through the centuries for justice and revenge.

Evie Lucus is a young artist in 1940 who falls in love with a dashing young pilot. I found her a weak character and the plot was too predictable. The editing of this book is poorly done with numerous grammatical and spelling errors. The repetitive phrases should have been removed as well.

I usually prefer Erskine's back stories, but in *The Darkest Hour*, I admired her current day character, Lucy Standish, much more than Evie. At least she had a backbone. The haunting isn't as riveting as her previous novels. The ghosts were more ridiculous than scary.

Hopefully Ms. Erskine will continue to portray ghostly heroines from ancient history rather than modern history in her future novels.

Angela says

As my 3 star rating shows, I liked it, but I didn't "really" like it.

I usually find reading Barbara Erskine's books "unputdownable", but I struggled with this one. I found it all too easy to put it down and wander off after only a few minutes of reading. I quite enjoyed the storyline, though I did find it predictable (I guessed the twists very early on), and I did find it quite an unhappy book. There wasn't much to lighten the mood, and I did find the leading lady of the story (Evie) a bit apathetic. She needed a good shake to make her see sense and to get her to make her mind up. I found her a bit of a wimp! However, I didn't dislike this book. Far from it, but I don't think it'll be one I'll re-read in a hurry.

Dale Harcombe says

Two and a half stars.

This is a story told in two time periods – the present and the 1940s. It took me a while to get into the style of it. I wasn't fussed on the way the narrative kept swapping so quickly from one time frame and one lot of characters to the other. It gave the book a fragmented feel. I mean it wasn't even a chapter devoted to each story, just a page or sometimes half a page before I was yanked off to the other time frame and characters. But after a while I settled down to the style and began to enjoy the story of Evie and her two suitors and her art career. In the present day the main characters are Lucy, an art historian who has a grant to write a biography of Evie, and Michael, great grandson of Evie.

I quite liked the two different stories, although I found some of the characters decisions seemed to me to be more just vehicles for moving the plot along. As for the ghost aspect - I found that over the top and annoying. It didn't gel for me.

So while the novel was okay, there were aspects of it that I didn't love or ring true to me and bits I found myself skimming over. Probably if I had had anything else on hand to read at the time I would have put it down because I never cared greatly about the characters. Of course I'm equally open to the fact that it may

have just been my frame of mind at the time as others seem to have loved it. Probably one the reader needs to make up their own mind about.
