



## We Must Be Brave

*Frances Liardet*

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**We Must Be Brave** Frances Liardet

**Spanning the sweep of the twentieth century, *We Must Be Brave* explores the fierce love that we feel for our children and the power of that love to endure. Beyond distance, beyond time, beyond life itself.**

"This stirring debut will work its way indelibly into your heart." --Georgia Hunter, author of *We Were the Lucky Ones*

*One woman. One little girl. The war that changed everything.*

December 1940. In the disorderly evacuation of Southampton, England, newly married Ellen Parr finds a small child asleep on the backseat of an empty bus. No one knows who little Pamela is.

Ellen professed not to want children with her older husband, and when she takes Pamela into her home and rapidly into her heart, she discovers that this is true: Ellen doesn't want children. She wants only Pamela. Three golden years pass as the Second World War rages on. Then one day Pamela is taken away, screaming. Ellen is no stranger to sorrow, but when she returns to the quiet village life she's long lived, she finds herself asking: In a world changed by war, is it fair to wish for an unchanged heart?

In the spirit of *We Were the Lucky Ones* and *The Nightingale*, here is a novel about courage and kindness, hardship and friendship, and the astonishing power of love.

## We Must Be Brave Details

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Author : Frances Liardet

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## From Reader Review We Must Be Brave for online ebook

### Travel.with.a.book says

From the beginning when I started to read the book I had issues about the sad and true story that the author tells.

I have heard a lot of war stories, I was part of a war and my parents told me everything they went through just so we can be alive and together and this novel is no different.

I wish there was no war anywhere in the world and the story of Ellen the main character in the book is so touchy with every person she connects and loses and she always decided to be brave that's our best to be brave.

The story of Ellen that loses her father in the war (Second World War) and Pamela decides to take her as her daughter.

Then her real father comes to take her in another place. Ellen has to deal with the fact that she loses some of her best friends and family member including Pamela.

I give the book 5 stars it's this kind of stories that I wish everyone reads and knlws a little bit of what the small or big innocent people go through with every mix feelings.

I was not a year still when me and my family were running away from our enemy.

Now we are all alive despite all the cold weather we had been through with no food, not to know where to go, to be alive.

It was hard for me to read this story and the author uses a great technique of writting that satisfied me from the begging to the end.

The book is not really big in length it has a normal size and it wraps the story so good so readers can devour perfectly a story that needs to be read.

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### Michael Cayley says

A story of loss which straddles the period from just after WW1 to the beginning of the 21st century.

It starts an air raid on Southampton during WW2. A little girl called Pamela is separated from her mother and taken by bus to a nearby village. Selwyn and Ellen take her in on a short-term emergency basis, and end up giving her a home after her mother is found to have died in the raid.

The core of the book is Ellen's life story and the next section is a retrospective portrayal of her moving from comfortable middle-class circumstances to extreme poverty in childhood. And then we see how Pamela transforms Ellen's life, bringing joy and then bleak sadness. Late in Ellen's life there are twists that bring further transformations. Ellen herself is adorable and capable but at times perverse and pig-headed.

The portrayal of children is very well done and not at all twee. They are not just sugar and spice and all things nice, but real beings who misbehave and have flashes of temper.

This is an intensely moving book that at times brought tears to my eyes. But the sorrows are balanced by moments of humour, and a small cast of quirky but believable other characters. Some, for me, were reminiscent of older family members I knew in my childhood of the 1950s and 1960s; most had their own losses and griefs.

I hugely enjoyed the novel.

With thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for letting me have an ARC in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Angela M says**

3.75 stars rounded up.

Even though the war feels as if it's at a distance from Upton, a small English village, the villagers are not immune to its impact in this War II story. As the bombs fall, children are separated from their mothers and fathers, for their safety with hopes of being reunited after the war, sometimes they are separated by circumstances they can't control and there is no hope of reuniting. A lost, orphaned little girl, Pamela whose life is forever changed, forever changes the life of a young married woman, Ellen who lives in this village. Pamela immediately takes Ellen's heart when Ellen finds the sleeping child left alone on a bus and her love for the little girl grows as deep as if the child were her own.

The book begins in 1940 and moves back and forth in time to the time of Ellen's difficult childhood, back to the time when the evacuations from South Hampton take place and then to the future. The chapters are dated and the time changes are not difficult to deal with. Ellen knew what it was like to be alone, to suffer hardship, poverty and loss so her empathy and emotional attachment to Pamela is understandable. She doesn't wish for Ellen to be alone and she hopes to keep her. There were parts that moved a little slowly and it seemed a little long at times, so not a solid 4 stars, but I did round up. Overall, it was a moving story with a heart touching ending. While this was a story of a few characters, it highlights a piece of a bigger story of this part of the war when so many were evacuated, especially children. The author tells of a personal loss in the beginning note and I found her story to be especially moving as it certainly reflects her understanding of loss. Recommend for those who enjoy historical fiction and a good story filled with love.

I received an advanced copy of this book from G.P. Putnam's Sons through Edelweiss.

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### **Rachel Levy says**

Historical fiction is my favorite genre and I love books that are about WWII. Though I was looking forward to reading *We Must Be Brave*, and it did accurately portray history and how the horrors of war impacted children as well as adults, I was disappointed. The story was slow and just did not capture my attention.

Ellen Parr, the main character, is childless and married to a much older man named Selwyn. She discovers a little girl, Pamela, all alone on a bus, and takes her in. The story takes us through Ellen's childhood, her marriage to Selwyn, why she is childless, and what happens when Pamela is taken away.

While Ellen's struggle was agonizing, and at times heartbreak, I could not connect to her or any of the characters. I kept hoping, as the story progressed, that a connection to the characters and their story would develop, but it did not happen for me. In the end, I didn't even have any lingering questions. Sadly, this is not a book that I will reread or even have on my shelf.

We Must Be Brave is scheduled to be published February 26, 2019. Thanks to NetGalley and HarperCollins for allowing me early access to read this book in exchange for an honest review.

2.5 Stars

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### **Elizabeth says**

We Must Be Brave is sort of a World War II story, but only in the barest of ways. It opens so strongly, with young (early 20s) Ellen finding a child, Pamela, alone on a bus in London in the confusion off the bombings. She tries to find Pamela's mother, who Pamela is anxious to be reunited with, and--yes, you can guess how it goes.

There's a lot (a lot) of description of food--the scarcity of it, what can be created with what's available--but although I normally am crazy for this kind of thing, it left me cold here. I think Frances Liardet met to convey more emotion and meaning that comes through in the flat writing.

And now that things are settled on their predictable path, the reader is then taken back through Ellen's hard, tragic past, complete with those early 20th century class distinctions and how horrible they were. I so wanted to be engaged, but I never could connect with Ellen or all she endures and how it shapes her. The predictable end to her time with Pamela, again, didn't move me, nor did the Pamela narrated section (set in 2010) at the end, which (yet again) went in the supposed to be heart tugging direction it was supposed to.

I so wanted to love this book, but the writing is overly detailed and never manages to convey the emotions it wants to. I could read the sweep and scope, the love and despair and hope and loss and so on, but it was as if it was all under glass. I could observe it, but feel it? No.

Disappointing.

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### **Allison says**

The publisher's summary suggests this is a story of World War II and the heartbreak of tearing families apart, but it is so much more. A young child is taken in by a couple when her mother is killed by a bomb. Despite the husband's misgivings, his young wife Ellen connects to traumatized Pamela and throughout the horrors of war, she creates a cocoon of love for the little girl. The special relationship is ripped apart when the child's father reappears. The book is not yet half complete when Pamela is forcibly removed to Ireland in the care of her distant cousins. How will the characters and the story continue?

When I said this was more than a story of World War II, the reader is also carried back to the childhood of Ellen with a story that is just as dramatic and heartbreak as the tale of her young ward. And then we are whisked ahead in great leaps to decades long past the end of the war.

The stalwart individuals who people this book will remind you of the salt-of-the-earth men and women from the chapters of Downton Abbey. You will love them all, even when they show their failings.

The writing of Francis Liardet is a joy to read. The descriptions of the English countryside and village life in the 1930's and 40's are perfectly lovely. Just the names of the flowers and weeds captured my imagination. The images of sky and hillside lingered in my mind. At no time did I want to skim a single descriptive paragraph. Beyond the descriptions, the events as revealed to the reader will keep you wondering and worrying about the fate of the characters. You will find yourself so invested in these flawed individuals, you

can hardly bear to let them go.

But as all stories do, this must also come to an end, and you will reach the final pages with mixed feelings of sadness and contentment. What more can you ask from a book?

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### **Emer says**

Now published in hardback.

from the blurb..."December, 1940. As German bombs fall on Southampton, the city's residents flee to the surrounding villages. In Upton village, amid the chaos, newly-married Ellen Parr finds a girl sleeping, unclaimed at the back of an empty bus. Little Pamela, it seems, is entirely alone.

*Ellen has always believed she does not want children, but when she takes Pamela into her home the child cracks open the past Ellen thought she had escaped and the future she and her husband Selwyn had dreamed for themselves. As the war rages on, love grows where it was least expected, surprising them all. But with the end of the fighting comes the realisation that Pamela was never theirs to keep."*

'We Must Be Brave' is a poignant novel that slowly reveals the life story of Ellen Parr. The book begins with her as a new bride during the Second World War and tells how she came to foster a little girl called Pamela who had been separated from her mother. The mother-daughter bond that develops between the two of them is the catalyst for the plot of the book as the book weaves in and out of different stages during Ellen's life and explores the impact that Pamela has on her life and how she lives it.

The story was very touching and at times incredibly moving, but personally I found the novel to be a little too slow moving on the whole. And while I fully empathised with Ellen's character, I felt quite disconnected from many of the secondary characters and never fully got to grips with their purposes in the book. Although this was not the case with Selwyn, Ellen's husband, as I really loved their relationship and the dynamics of their marriage. I was also a fan of how the timeline was structured in the novel. I never once felt confused as to whether or not we were flashing backwards in time or moving chronologically.

Overall this was a positive read for me that I am rating a strong three and a half stars. I would recommend this book to people who like both historical fiction and emotional stories and to those that are interested in reading about the triumph of the human spirit to cope with grief and loss as this book has that in abundance.

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*\*An e-copy of this book was kindly provided to me by the publisher, Harper Collins UK: 4th Estate, via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.\**

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### **Theresa Smith says**

This novel was just divine. Such a beautifully moving study on love, compassion, and courage. It examines the different ways in which people can make an impact on the lives of others and explores the many different types of love that can exist. This novel covers a large period of time, it's quiet and literary, character driven for most of the way; I just adored every single page.

“Do you know why I’m not frightened of the cold? Because I know about it. How you can let it sink right into your bones, and it won’t damage you at all. I know how to suck on a pebble to keep hunger pangs away. You have to do that, you know, if you’ve just given a child your own food. The pain’s excruciating otherwise. And I can carry her, further than anyone. I can walk twenty miles with nothing inside me but the skin of a baked potato. You say I’ve got no idea about war, and shelling. Well, you’ve got no idea what I can endure for her sake.”

We Must Be Brave is as much of a community story as it is Ellen’s. When the story opens, the village of Upton is in the midst of helping evacuees from Southampton, whose homes have been bombed in German air raids. Ellen, newly married to an older man whom she adores and who in turn adores her, is comfortably upper class, childless by choice, and running the local mill with her husband. In the midst of assisting the evacuees, she comes upon a small child, only about four years of age, sleeping alone on a bus, seemingly belonging to no one. She takes her home for the night, along with several other evacuees, who they are providing emergency shelter for. Ellen and her husband are already fostering three young boys from London as part of the children evacuation scheme. Over the next few days, it becomes apparent that the little girl, Pamela, is effectively an orphan, and she remains with Ellen and her husband, as their unofficial foster daughter. This is of course at the height of the war, so it didn’t seem at all unusual that she remained there. Ellen was already fostering the three boys, so one more child left with them made perfect sense. As Ellen becomes attached to Pamela in ways she could not have foreseen, memories of her complicated relationship with her own mother throughout her childhood rise to the fore and we become privy to Ellen’s riches to rags upbringing, which really made my heart ache.

“I clamped my knees and teeth together, trying to keep it away from me. But it was in vain. I was in it up to my neck. She’d been clean and young and beautiful and now look at her. Look at us, living in dirt and dreck with Edward gone and a carpet on our bed. Daddy wasn’t mad. He was just a wastrel and coward who had taken a coward’s way out after robbing us. Left us in our coal dust and our filthy worn linen and our dry potatoes.”

There were several people throughout Ellen’s childhood who helped her along the way, as poverty stricken as she was. Some of the time, Ellen was aware of this, but more often than not, help was offered discretely, with Ellen not even finding out until many years later. I really enjoyed these moments of discovery along the way for Ellen, whose gratitude was always very much in evidence. Ellen herself was a beautiful person, remarkably matter of fact about so many things, but she also had hidden depths, hurts she had buried down deep, a lot of things unresolved. Her marriage was unconventional, but it was filled with love and I appreciated the way the author explored this.

“I might turn into a thousand things – who could tell? But I couldn’t live my life according to what I might be, or might want. I was myself, now. And he was here, now. A man who wouldn’t just hold me and kiss me, but a man I could say anything to and be understood, a man who could open the world to me with his heart and mind. How many women had that? Didn’t he realise what we could be, together?”

There were many loves in Ellen’s life. Her mother, her brother, her husband; and then there was Lucy, the only person who spoke to Ellen after her plummet into poverty, where she was forced to attend the village school as a pauper and live in one of the partially condemned welfare houses. Lucy becomes more than Ellen’s best friend, she is her other half. I loved the friendship between these two women, the highs and the lows, the foot in mouth moments that led to fights and the times they were perfectly in sync. This was friendship done right.

“This was what happened when you knew a woman for over forty years. You knew her thoughts, the way

they ran, almost as well as you knew your own.”

And then there was Ellen’s greatest love: Pamela, who is only with her for a little over three years, but her impact upon Ellen is lasting. This relationship was so beautiful, naturally evolving from two people being thrown together in turbulent times, and discovering that they were meant to be, except that they weren’t. It was only ever temporary. I’ve never really given much thought, to how hard it must have been to host children during the war, particularly little ones who are in those formative years, bonding and then having to just give them back. The break between Ellen and Pamela was devastating, and it left its mark permanently on both of them. It takes a lot of courage to love someone you know you’re going to lose. I haven’t admired a character as much as Ellen for a very long time. She was beautifully crafted by the author.

“She hadn’t smiled all morning, and I realised I’d seen the last of her smiles the previous day, and I wouldn’t see another.”

We Must Be Brave is a deeply meaningful novel that sweeps through time with a gentle grace. It’s perfect for lovers of literary historical fiction, who like their novels to dig deep into its characters, while still providing a thought provoking story. Another top read for the year.

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Thanks is extended to HarperCollins Publishers Australia via NetGalley for providing me with a copy of We Must Be Brave for review.

### **Brenda Ayala says**

This is a beach read disguised as historical fiction.

Some defining characteristics of a beach read: light, sort of airy tones. There’s conflict of some kind, but it never really feels like anyone or anything is in actual danger of not being ok in the end. Fuzzy happy warm feelings of happy at the end.

So you can imagine that a book emphasizing WWII that has those characteristics probably isn’t all that riveting. It’s sweet and a little sad, but the sadness doesn’t last because you know the cause won’t last either.

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### **Adele Shea says**

Frances Liardet's, We Must Be Brave, is heartwarming at its best. I dare you to not fall in love with the characters.

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### **SissiReads says**

I finished We Must Be Brave by Frances Liardet a few days ago. All the emotions I had when I finished the book still lingered. The feelings of sadness, sorrow, hope and most of all the feeling of love still lingered days after I read this book.

This is a story set in England during WWII period and about a 4 year old girl Pamela being left behind on a bus and Ellen, the main character from the book, picked her up and bought her home herself so the little girl can stay safe. The story started from there and all the way to present time.

What I love most about this book is the breathtakingly beautiful, whimsical and lyrical writing. It is so tender that it captivates all my emotions. Small details like this from the book “When I reached William’s shed I leaned the bicycle against the wall and, at her insistence, lifted her down. She clung, briefly, like an infant monkey, and the shock of delight was accompanied, as always, by a white flare of pain in my lower back,” have moved me to tears countless time.

This is a beautifully crafted, profoundly moving story about the resilience of love. It touches me deeply and it speaks to my heart and my soul. The ending of the book has also taken me by surprise. I would have imagined it to be a big emotional scene, but the author has taken us on a different path a different route; it is quieter, calmer, more tender, which I absolutely adore. Because regardless what happens, regardless of sadness, tragedy, sorrow, and loss of time, life goes on. It is the people that we love and the people who love us propel us through difficulties, through loneliness and through life.

This book is one of my very favourite reads this year. It is coming out next February and you will not want to miss it.

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### **Brandice says**

*We Must Be Brave* was a struggle for me. I generally enjoy historical fiction but this book moved at an incredibly slow pace. It was difficult for me to get into the story, stay invested, and enjoy it. There are many positive reviews for *We Must Be Brave* so maybe it just wasn't for me.

The setting is England during WWII. Ellen finds a little girl, Pamela, alone on a bus. Ellen does not have children of her own but takes Pamela in and becomes close with her. Pamela leaves Ellen's home later in the story, which is tough on both her and Ellen. The story follows Ellen later in life (post-Pamela's departure) and also includes flashbacks to her own childhood and earlier adult years. I found the flashbacks to be more dull than the current timeline and they didn't really keep my interest.

Ellen was a kind and caring main character, always willing to do what needed to be done to help others. I admired her care and compassion for people yet still had a hard time connecting with her, other characters, and the overall story. I also felt the book could have cut 100 pages without detracting from the story. I did, however, enjoy the book's ending. I thought it was a nice way to conclude this story that spanned several years.

*Thank you to NetGalley for providing an advanced copy of We Must Be Brave in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Penelope says**

I finished this book at the end of my lunch hour and returned to work slightly red eyed and a bit sniffy but filled with the joy of a marvellous ending to a wonderful book. This beautifully told, heartfelt novel tells a

story of love, loss and discovery spanning the 20th century. Looking at the bonds between parent and child and the hard decisions that are sometimes necessary we are shown that families, whether those we are born into or those that find us, always play a part in making us the people we become. I adored the complex and believable characters, with all their faults and flaws but also with their capacity to love and to reach out a hand in the darkest of times. This will definitely be a book that I will be recommending.

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### **Natalie says**

I opened this book, expecting something ordinary about WWII in England, but I found a perfect little gem about love, not war. The love is between Ellen and the little girl she “found” after an attack in a nearby town. It soon became apparent that the child, Pamela, had lost her mother. Ellen takes this child to her heart and there is great mutual love, until their existence is shattered when Pamela is returned, despite her deep unhappiness, to her father’s family.

Ellen was shattered, but as life went on another child became part of her life.

The story of these women, surrounded by the characters of the village of Upton, make this novel a small treasure. As a reader, I keep thinking of the interpretation of the title, WE MUST BE BRAVE, and all the meanings I found within this novel.

Thank you Netgalley for allowing me to review this very special novel.

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### **Susan Hampson says**

This is a story that not only touched my heart it squeezed it dry. War stories are always tear jerkers and this one was no exception for me. It isn’t a front line story, this is a story of a childless woman and an abandoned three-year old girl wrapped in a blanket and left on a bus. But the story goes way past the end of the war. Ellen was married and quite adamant that she did not want a family but the day she found Pamela she knew that she needed this little girl in her life as much as the little girl needed a family. The relationship that grows between the pair is as close as any mother and daughter with lovely tender moments. Three years later Ellen learns of a man looking for his daughter after he has returned from the war and she knows in her heart that he is Pamela’s real father.

The heart breaking scenes that follow really got to me and greatly impacted Pamela and Ellen. It really made me think deeper about the children that were sent to the countryside through the war years, not always to loving homes and how it must have affected the whole family. Then after the war the trauma of families being returned that were like strangers coming together. The loss felt by the families that had housed them too and friends that they had made.

The stories follow the lives of Ellen and Pamela and letters that made me cry. The emotions that were built up ready to explode and questions from a little girl now a woman. The end of this story is very, very emotional that had me sobbing. A truly amazing story.

I wish to thank NetGalley and Harper Collins UK for an e-copy of the book which I have reviewed honestly.

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