



The Gilded Lily

Deborah Swift

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A spellbinding historical novel of beauty and greed and surprising redemption

England, 1660. Ella Appleby believes she is destined for better things than slaving as a housemaid and dodging the blows of her drunken father. When her employer dies suddenly, she seizes her chance--taking his valuables and fleeing the countryside with her sister for the golden prospects of London. But London may not be the promised land she expects. Work is hard to find, until Ella takes up with a dashing and dubious gentleman with ties to the London underworld. Meanwhile, her old employer's twin brother is in hot pursuit of the sisters.

Set in a London of atmospheric coffee houses, gilded mansions, and shady pawnshops hidden from rich men's view, Deborah Swift's *The Gilded Lily* is a dazzling novel of historical adventure.

The Gilded Lily Details

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From Reader Review The Gilded Lily for online ebook

Beadyjan says

I'll be honest here I'm in the fortunate position of receiving quite a few free books and win quite a few too and the excitement of winning a signed copy of a brand new title of a book I've heard good things about never dissipates (OK I admit that I'm a hopeless book addict). Which is why I literally jumped for joy when I won a signed copy of The Gilded Lily through [www.http://dizzycslittlebookblog.blog...](http://dizzycslittlebookblog.blog...)

I KNEW I was going to like this historical fiction set in grimy, 17th century, restoration London. When I received my copy and saw the gorgeous cover I was smitten, my only concern being that there is a previous book by the author The Lady's Slipper featuring some of the same characters and I worried it might be a little difficult to follow not having read it. My concerns were unfounded, this makes a great stand alone novel and a perfect introduction to the authors beautiful writing.

The Gilded Lily is the story of two sisters, Ella and Sadie, fleeing from their rural home in the North, taking items with them from Emmas previous employer to which she has no right. The girls head for the seething mass and anonymity of the city of London in a bid to escape persecution for a greater crime than the theft of some treasures, Ella swears she did not commit although it soon becomes apparent that she is a much more flighty and unreliable character than her shy, timid sister born with a disfiguring birthmark on her face.

Unlike Sadie, whose natural instinct is to hide away from company, vivacious Ella is more ambitious and outgoing and soon forsakes the job both girls have found working in a Perrukiers weaving wigs from discarded human hair (yeeuch), for the chance to better herself and sets her cap at the enigmatic and striking Jay Whitgift, son of a respected pawnbroker seeking to diversify the family business in more ways than one.

The Gilded Lily is a ladies salon he opens in the grounds of the secondhand business, primarily to relive the wives and daughters of wealthy businessmen of their husbands hard earned wealth and he employs Ella to help him do this.

Soon she gets ideas far above her station and despite Sadies loyalty to her flighty sister, she increasingly leaves Sadie to fend for herself in the squalor of their rented room in the delightfully named Blackraven lane. Meanwhile the search for the 2 fleeing sisters continues and their increasing notoriety means measures have to be taken to ensure they are not recognised in public and gradually both girls lives grow much worse.

It's stunningly written with a Dickensian quality, especially in the names of the vividly created characters and places. I was gripped from start to finish, and despite wanting to give Sadie a little shake now and again I had great empathy for her and enjoyed watching her character develop. It has taken a while to finish it, but the ending was full of action and very satisfying and I actually put the book down at around midnight with about 30 pages to go only to wake up at 1.30 am realizing I couldn't wait until the next day to find out what happened, so put on the bedside light and finished it there and then.

It's almost a coming of age novel but with huge depth and I liked it as much as one of my favourite books Slammerkin

I'm actually relieved that I did enjoy it as much as I'd hoped (if not more) as sadly so often books which sound great don't quite live up to expectations - this one exceeds them and I will be rushing out to get a copy of the prequel to this today!

Aimee says

I love reading historical fiction and this book is a great example of a good historical fiction book. The plot is exciting and kept me reading, I could not figure out how Ella and Sadie were going to get themselves out of the mess they found themselves in. They seemed to be in danger everywhere they turned and it really made this book a fast page turner.

The characters are interesting, but Swift really only takes the time to bring out the characters of the two sisters into any detail. Sadie and Ella are total opposites and Swift does an excellent job of showing the strengths and weaknesses of both and the love/hate relationship they end up having because of all of the stress put on both girls. I enjoyed reading about both of them and felt like I really got to know about each sister's personality.

The setting of the book is London in the 1600's and Swift does a wonderful job of bringing London at this time to life. I really got a sense of how hard it would be to be poor and living in London during the long, cold winters. I really felt for both girls as they struggled to survive.

This is a well written book with an interesting plot, a detailed setting, and characters that you really get to know and care for. I would recommend this one to any historical fiction fan, it is great book.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Set in the 1660s, the story follows Ella and Sadie Appleby, girls from rural England who flee to London after a tragedy with Ella's employer, and there they find themselves struggling to survive. Restoration London for these two is dark, dank, dirty, and exhausting, and Swift's writing made the grime, fog, and muck all too real. (I wanted to shower every time I put the book down!)

Ella -- beautiful and bold -- gets a job as a sales girl at an unusual ladies boutique called The Gilded Lily. Sadie, marked with a noticeable birthmark on her face, remains cloistered in their rented room as relatives of Ella's dead employer search London for them. Ella becomes enamored of her new employer and her increasing status as a London icon, while Sadie bristles at being trapped -- literally, as Ella locks her away to keep her sister from being tempted out into public, risking capture.

I was immediately grabbed by this book -- the novel opens with a bang -- and Ella and Sadie are fascinating characters. Swift shows their complicated relationship -- selfish Ella, shy Sadie -- and I liked both of them a good deal (even Ella, who did some rather despicable things!). There's intrigue and scandal -- this *is* Restoration England -- but instead of royal mistresses, *The Gilded Lily* features common women scrabbling for fame and fortune, safety, some measure of comfort.

One of the things I loved about this book was Swift's use of dialogue. She used what I presume were historical phrases and slang -- at times a little surprising, but I was able to guess the meaning through context -- and I appreciated that never once did the story, or the characters, sound anachronistic. (Or worse, my pet peeve, overly Shakespearean or classical.) I should note I'm reading the UK edition of this book; I don't know if the dialogue will be 'Americanized' for the US edition (I hope not.).

I also appreciated the focus on sisters - sibling relationships in historical fiction is always fun -- and the seedy focus of the story. (It is, however, pretty low on the risque factor, to my surprise.) I was initially apprehensive when I heard this was a follow up to Swift's first novel, *The Lady's Slipper*, as I hadn't read it, but from the author's note at the end of the book, it seems the main character of that book is a peripheral figure in this one.

At more than 460 pages, this is a chunky historical that raced, with enough intrigue and distinctive characters to keep me glued to the pages. A fun read especially if royal romances aren't your kind of historical.

Jo Barton says

In 1660, and following the suspicious death of their employer, Ella and Sadie Appleby are forced to flee their native Westmorland. They head for the bright lights of the capital city where the sisters try to eke out a living, first as perruquiers at Madame Lefevre's wig making shop, and then, when Ella is seduced by the ostentatious glamour of the beauty parlour on Friarsgate, Sadie, the more fragile of the two, is left to cope as best she can.

Whilst there is sometimes an air of romanticism attached to Restoration London, in *The Gilded Lily* Deborah Swift has successfully cut through the gloss and glamour, and describes the city as a living, breathing entity. Gloriously atmospheric, the sights, sounds and smells are brought so vividly to life that you watch in fascination as Madame Lefevre controls her girls in the wig makers shop, you sample the potions and lotions on offer in the beauty parlour, and as you climb the rickety stairs with Sadie and Ella and enter their house on Blackraven Alley, the squalid and festering nature of their life is so realistic you can almost feel the flickering warmth from their meagre fire.

The richness of the supporting characters, the grit and realism of the action, all combine to make this a fascinating and strong story about two sisters whose need to support each other is not always successful, and yet when the odds are stacked against them, the overwhelming urge to survive is paramount.

Deborah Swift has undoubtedly captured this niche in the historic fiction market; both her books have captured the time and place with an authenticity which is sometimes lacking in this genre. I look forward to more books by this talented writer.

Jessica McCann says

Received this as a Christmas gift. Heard so many good things about it. Can't wait to crack it open.

Update: This was a great read. My favorite novels not only tell a captivating story but also sweep me away to a time and place I've never seen. *The Gilded Lily*, a dark tale set in 17th century London, expertly does both. Part historical novel, part psychological thriller, this book touches on some of the most sinister and deplorable aspects of human nature and is by no means a light read.

It's clear the author did her homework, though the historical detail she weaves never feels heavy handed. Her vivid descriptions of the bitter cold, filthy living conditions and callous actions of many of the characters evoke strong emotions. I often felt frustrated, disgusted, depressed and uncomfortable as I read. Thankfully, there were also several scenes and characters that restored my hopes and lifted my spirits. I found the ending

to be satisfying, though a bit too neatly drawn.

One historical element I found particularly fascinating was the Frost Fair, held during the bitter cold winters in which the Thames river actually froze solid; and I appreciated the author's note in the back of the book that listed sources for additional reading about the subject.

Jenny Q says

Seventeenth-century London comes to life in this gritty story about sisters and survival. It's a tale of the inner workings of London and the many people who make up the great machine of industry and commerce that keeps it all running. Though Charles II rules over them with his notoriously extravagant and debauched court, it means nothing to the characters of this tale, who must fight, grasp, struggle, and reach for any opportunity at a better life among the trash-heaped, grime-covered, cutthroat streets of London's working-class neighborhoods.

Ella Appleby is a bold young woman from the little village of Netherbarrow who dreams of a life more worldly and important than the one she was born to. When a dishonest opportunity to attain such a life presents itself, she takes it, and takes her younger sister Sadie along for the ride. Arriving in London with a trunk full of stolen goods, Ella is convinced the girls will be able to hide from the law and live a better life, two faces in a sea of millions. But it doesn't take long for the girls to realize their new life is not going to be so easy, with jobs scarce, and food and firewood even scarcer, and especially when wanted posters start appearing around town describing the girls, and Sadie's port-wine birthmark, to a tee.

Ella catches a lucky break and accepts a position in pawnbroker Jay Whitgift's boutique for fashionable ladies, but Sadie is forced into hiding and relying on Ella for her survival. As Ella is tantalized by the glamour of her new job and caught up in Jay's plans for the future, which she desperately wants to be a part of, she begins to resent Sadie and her birthmark, and her obligation to keep her safe and sound. As Ella grasps higher and higher for a prize beyond her reach, Sadie grows increasingly lonely and remorseful, and disapproving of Ella's lifestyle, and the sisters' relationship deteriorates at the time when they need each other the most. Though it is Ella who plots and schemes and reaches for what she thinks will be a better life, it is Sadie who forms the real heart of this tale, a beacon of hope and honesty and goodness in a world of adversity and poverty and immorality. When Ella's glamorous position takes a turn toward the dark side, her plans begin to crumble, and the law draws its net around her, Sadie has to find the courage to fend for herself and to reach for her own happiness, and to save her sister before it's too late.

The Gilded Lily is impeccably written historical fiction. The detail is superb and life in London is so vividly depicted that the city seems to take on its own persona and become a lurking character in the story, one that is always there, and one whose motives are never clear. The characters are incredibly well-developed and realistic, and even the supporting and tertiary characters are multi-faceted. I was delighted by the use of period language and street slang; it really enhanced the atmosphere without ever being cumbersome or unnatural. I did find the pacing of the story to be very slow and I felt like it took me a long time to finish it, but in a way it is the type of novel that needs to be savored slowly, because it so completely brings the time period to life that you almost want to stop and revel in it for a while to soak up the experience and make sure you don't miss any fascinating little detail. Overall I found *The Gilded Lily* to be an enjoyable read, a bit heavy, but rich in ambiance and character-driven story, and a transporting view into the life of everyday people in Restoration London.

Lynn says

I'm not sure why this book received so many 5 stars, to me it was too drawn out and rather dull. Yes it does shed light on the darker side of London in the 1600 and the writing is not bad, it's just not great.

Colleen Turner says

I reviewed this book for luxuryreading.com.

After her employer dies suddenly, Ella Appleby grabs everything of value and her younger sister, Sadie, and runs for the anonymity of London. Believing she is destined for a better life than as an obedient servant to uncaring masters or an abusive father, she sees London as her chance to start fresh with endless possibilities. But 1661 London is filthy, overcrowded and cruel and while Ella's country beauty blends in with others around them Sadie's distinctive port wine stained face sets them apart, something that is dangerous for two girls trying to lay low. Even more dangerous is the angry twin brother of Ella's previous employer, a man who believes the girls not only robbed but murdered his brother and will stop at nothing to seek justice.

As her former employer's brother gets closer to tracking the girls down, offering a hefty reward to anyone who can lead him to the "Savage Sisters", Ella believes Sadie is keeping her from fully realizing her wish for a new life and begins making dubious decisions to further separate them. However, when the gilding of this much sought after new life begins to chip away, Ella realizes that she has lead them both into a web that they might not be able to survive.

Described as a companion volume to Deborah Swift's *The Lady's Slipper*, *The Gilded Lily* works perfectly as a stand-alone novel. The descriptions and dialogue immerse the reader in Restoration era London and it really is a shock to look up and realize that you aren't actually slinking down the cramped back alleys with the Appleby sisters. Everything around the girls is harsh – from the weather to the people to their circumstances – and the reader is hard pressed not to wish right alongside them for a chance at a happy life.

The sisters could not be more different – Ella is beautiful, hot tempered and selfish for the majority of the time while Sadie is shy, sweet and innocently oblivious to a lot of what happens around her – and while I can't say I was a fan of Ella's decisions they are both very real representations of poor women trying to survive on their own in this time and place. Every single character highlights a different form of desperation and serves to show that money, status and belongings do not guarantee happiness. Far from a feel good story it is very real and raw and does hint at some good things to come in the future for certain characters.

Loving the dark corners and shiny optimism of the possibility of a better life when it couldn't get much worse, *The Gilded Lily* is a great example of realistic historical fiction. I am excited to read *The Lady's Slipper* and see how it ties in to the atmosphere and world this book makes me want to linger in a little longer.

Charlotte Betts says

I enjoyed *The Lady's Slipper* so looked forward to reading the companion novel, *The Gilded Lily*, which continues the story of Ella Appleby. I wasn't disappointed. Deborah Swift's lush writing carries you to another, darker, time and place.

In the harsh winter of 1661 Ella Appleby and her sister, Sadie, flee Westmoreland in the dead of night after Ella robs her dead employer. They hope to hide themselves in the teeming streets of London but a game of cat and mouse ensues as the dead man's brother makes it his mission to bring them to justice.

Seduced by the tawdry glamour of the city, Ella sets her sights on flamboyant Jay Whitgift, owner of a society ladies' beauty parlour. Nothing is what it seems, least of all Jay Whitgift, a satisfyingly nasty villain who has dangerous secrets of his own. Soon a rift has formed between Ella and Sadie, and the sisters are threatened by a menace more sinister than even the law.

Ella behaves badly but it's hard not to hold a secret admiration for her as she seeks to improve her life by ruthless ambition. Utterly selfish, she displays casual cruelty to her younger sister and yet, somehow, I began to feel sorry for her. Ella, in turn, is cruelly used by Jay Whitgift but not in the manner you might expect. The author's previous career as a set and costume designer is evident from the richly detailed descriptions, while the superbly written dialogue makes the characters absolutely real.

Deborah Swift's assured and carefully researched writing makes *The Gilded Lily* an unputdownable read and I eagerly anticipate her next novel.

Holly Weiss says

Formerly released in England to rave reviews, this book is finally available in the US on November 27. Greed, adventure, danger, mystery, and history combine for a memorable, absorbing read.

You will be hooked by this masterfully told story by the middle of chapter one. Sisters Ella and Sadie Appleby flee their home in Westmoreland by night after the suspicious death of Ella's employer. Danger lurks around every corner and the reader is caught up in an engrossing adventure. Can Ella and Sadie stay two steps ahead of the constable? Will they survive this mess they have made for themselves? We read of their blundering persistence amid the squalor of life with the unfortunates on the streets of London. They work for a malicious wig-maker, until Ella lands a job at a ladies emporium participating in a scam to determine what wealthy homes are left empty and open for stealing.

After receiving copious praise for her first novel, *The Lady's Slipper*, Ms. Swift continues to garner praise for her knowledge of the seventeenth century and her ability to weave complex characters and spot-on historical detail. Restoration London is exquisitely evoked with period detail and dialogue.

Swift imbues her characters with palpable motives and impressive survival skills. The tension set up between Ella and Sadie keeps the reader guessing about their relationship and hazardous exploits. Ella is bold, conniving, and nasty to Sadie. She knows how to keep a secret and to use her bosom and dimples to her advantage. She is very smart, but her appreciation for the finer things in life is her downfall. Sweet-natured Sadie is the more layered character. She is hopeful despite being scorned for having "the Devil's paw print" (a birthmark) on her face. A master seamstress with a big heart, she forgives her sister over and over for harsh treatment. The character of Dennis is a special treat—a must-have-friend for any down and out girl.

The author paints the poor sections of Restoration London accurately—squalid and hazardous.

The story is not sunshine and flowers. It is real. The dark nature of the book is balanced by a surprising redemption at the end.

Reviewed by Holly Weiss, author of *Crestmont*

Lucinda says

Delicate and finely woven, this golden novel shines brightly as a beautiful historical narrative.

“Beauty is skin-deep. Blood runs deeper” The exquisite, beautiful cover of this novel is striking, standing out on the bookshelf from other novels as it takes you back in time even before you open its pages. I was so excited by the prospect of reading a new fictional work within a genre that I adore, by an author whose work I had not encountered before and yet now whom I hope I will discover more of.

Set in the harsh winter of 1661 this tale follows Sadie Appleby from Westmorland, who with her sister Ella is on the run from undertaking a robbery (her recently deceased employer) heading to London. However the past catches up with them as his relatives begin the chase in the cold winter, scurrying after the girls around the bustling city teeming with all kinds of people. Seduced and mesmerized by all that London has to offer, Ella is captivated by a Jay Whitgift who is not the man that he appears to be and nothing is as it seems. Soon tensions arise between the sisters as hidden secrets are revealed and an ever present threat shows itself, even more deadly than the law. Deborah Swift brings history to life in all its color and glory by sending the reader back into a time that was full of deceit, beauty and desire. Here one discovers the bond between flesh and blood and its strength as to that compared to romantic love and friendship, where the two sisters are connected; being both a burden and a powerful thing. As Ella begins to work in the shop ‘The Gilded Lily’ selling beautifying lotions and potions, she settles down into secure employment whilst trying to put the past behind her. For Sadie life is much harder, namely due to her birthmark scar which causes unwelcome attention to a timid and sensitive young girl.

Deborah Swift’s second novel (*The Lady’s Slipper* novel one), is an accurate and authentic exposé of the seventeenth-century. It is a time when fortunes can be made and lost, of opportunity and where you find your inmost self. Atmospheric and authentic this is a gripping tale, full of exciting adventure with faced-paced action that leaves you breathless. The emotion and heartbreaking words touch your inmost soul as this captivating story takes your breath away. I lost myself within the characters lives; their trials and tribulations. I was astonished by the author’s skill and accomplished writing that contains a perfect balance of historical detail (from research) and narrative, that brings a bygone era back to life as you immerse yourself within the sights and sounds of a once booming industry. The depth of feeling and expression through the main characters was touching, as I was able to relate and empathize with them as the author added realism into their tale. The use of detailed description really brought the words to life so that once I began to read I was unable to tear my eyes away from this most interesting story that felt like I was watching a classic film. I can’t enthuse enough about this wonderful story that was as delicate as lace and as well-structured as works by Diana Gabaldon, Christine Blevins or Gillian Bagwell.

I would like to thank the author for holding her outstanding book as a giveaway on DizzyC’s LittleBookBlog and for Carol hosting it. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this interesting tale, hence I cannot wait to discover and read more of the author’s works.

Marg says

As readers we first met Ella Appleby in the pages of *The Lady's Slipper*. In that story Ella was portrayed as a somewhat conniving young lady who would let nothing and no-one step in the way of what she wants. And what Ella wants more than anything is to be a fine lady, sleeping in expensive linen, dressed in gorgeous clothes.

Initially, Ella is convinced that the best way to achieve that goal is to become mistress to Thomas Ibbetson, but that plan goes awry when Thomas falls seriously ill and dies. Ella knows that she has to leave the small village that she has always lived in and quickly but she can't possibly leave her sister, Sadie, behind. The two girls take everything of value in the house and flee to the relative anonymity of London but the dead man's twin brother is hot on their trail and it isn't long before there are wanted posters scattered throughout London.

Read the rest of my thoughts about this book on my blog

<http://www.theintrepidreader.com/2012...>

Steena says

I struggled to get through this book and it took me just over a month to finish, which is a **long** time. I forced myself to complete it (when I might otherwise DNFed) because, at the time, I could not put my thumb on what bothered me. I felt it was unfair to give up on a book without a definite reason.

The plot, two country sisters, accused of murdering and robbing their master, their flight to London, and subsequent struggles to evade the law sounds like it should be a real page turner. I can find no faults with the historical research employed in the book. And yet, I just could not get excited about this book.

Having now finished the book and had some time to consider, I believe my lack of enthusiasm comes down to two key points.

1. The characters. I just don't like any of them. The sisters, in particular, are lacking real depth. One is intensely selfish, the other so meek, and both are difficult to sympathize with. Add to this that there are monumental shifts in character temperament and motivation toward the end of the book, all to bring the plot to quick resolution.
2. The pacing. The opening chapters of this book, leading up to the flight to London, are catching enough. I wanted to know what would happen to these characters. But, once the initial conflict is set up, we are treated to the long, tedious, meat of the story, in which, not much happens. While this may be accurate to life on the lam, it does not make for good reading. The last fifth of the book, dealing with the resolution, picks up the pace again but seems, at this point, so hurried and hastily put together, as to come off sloppy.

In the end, *The Gilded Lily* was not my cup of tea but it was not a bad story, just a poorly executed one. Others, with more patience than I, may find this to be an excellent read.

Heather C says

Knowing that the author had previously released *The Lady's Slipper*, and knowing that it was a companion piece to *The Gilded Lily*, I tried to find the opportunity to read it first, however due to time constraints that just did not happen. I had concerns that I would feel like I was missing something. I am happy to say that is not the case at all – however at times I made note that I would probably have had a more well-rounded reading experience had I read *The Lady's Slipper* first.

Swift's strongest skill is her ability to create a living, breathing world in which to place her characters. The pages just oozed 17th century London and the reader is instantly transported into the same dark alleys and hard-times that the characters are enduring. I especially enjoyed the fairs on the frozen Thames River. My previous reading experience with this time period has always been within and around the royal court and its entourage and the world Swift creates is almost as far as you can get in the other extreme. We experience poverty, sickness, hunger, freezing temperatures, etc among other travails the characters need to endure. We get the opportunity to peek into several professions of commoners – perruquiers (wig makers), shop attendants, maids, and pawn brokers – not necessarily common places for novel heroines to frequent.

Regarding one of the biggest did-she-or-didn't-she moments in this novel, we are kept in the dark from about page 4 up until almost the end of the novel. While this would usually be something that frustrates me, the pace of this novel was so rapid that you didn't even notice that you were suddenly 300 pages in and at that point almost done with the book. The book was narrated intermittently by three different characters and this was executed very well. You were never confused as to who was telling the story or what their unique perspective was.

A quick word about the cover (the US version) – for once I think that the cover artist may have actually read something of the novel because as I read the description of an outfit Ella was wearing I immediately turned over the cover – and there it was! Great job!

I can say that *The Gilded Lily* has been among my favorite reads this year and will likely end up within my top 10 reads. I anxiously await the time to be able to read *The Lady's Slipper*.

This book was received for review from the publisher - I was not compensated for my opinions and the above is my honest review.

Amy Bruno says

New tour with HF Virtual Book Tours...September 2012 for UK release and November 2012 for US release!
