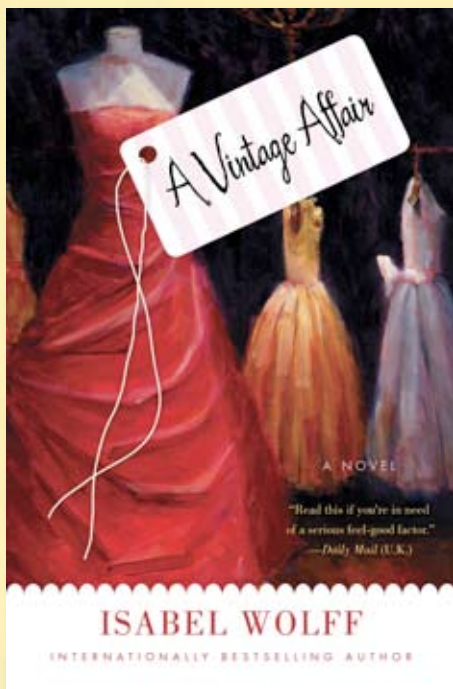




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This word is not in every dictionary, but it is one that booksellers often use—and the one we use to describe our Barnes & Noble Recommends Main Selections. Nothing gives us more pleasure than recommending books that we have read and loved, and finding unputdownable books gives us the greatest pleasure of all.

Barnes & Noble Recommends provides us with the opportunity to share the books we've enjoyed with you. Each of our Main Selections is chosen by a group of our discriminating and independent-minded booksellers from across the country, and all are riveting reads that are sure to provoke stimulating discussion. Every one of these novels is a book you'll want to recommend to another reader, including our newest selection: *A Vintage Affair* by Isabel Wolff.

PREVIOUS SELECTIONS INCLUDE:

THE THIRTEENTH TALE Diane Setterfield	THE GUERNSEY LITERARY AND POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows
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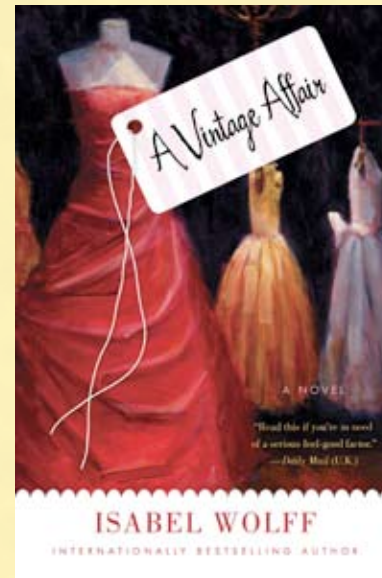
The Fabric of Friendship, the Thread of Love.

Phoebe Swift had a charmed life: a successful career at Sotheby's, new love with a handsome fiancé, the promise of happy years to come. So her decision to quit her job, break her engagement, and open her own vintage clothing boutique—all in one fell swoop—struck some as abrupt, even self-sabotaging. "I felt I needed a change," Phoebe explains to Dan Robinson, an attractive journalist—in strikingly mismatched clothes—who comes to interview her just before the grand opening of her shop in Blackheath, South London.

But it's not really that simple. Although Phoebe's store is the culmination of a lifelong passion for fashions from another era, the heart of its owner is weighed down with grief due to the death of her best friend, Emma Kitts. Phoebe can't forgive herself for underestimating the urgency of Emma's calls for help; while she enjoyed a Valentine's Day dinner with her fiancé, Emma slipped away.

To evade her guilt, Phoebe throws herself into her work, filling the shop with Pucci silks, Chanel tweeds, Balenciaga gowns, and personal favorites, including a selection of "cupcake dresses"—

strapless satin gowns from the 1950s frothed with tulle and frosted with crystals. The shop is instantly popular, and the women drawn to its dresses—especially the "cupcakes"—enliven the novel with their own disappointments, decisions, and dreams. Purchasing a piece of someone's past, they're also buying hopes for their own futures.



As Phoebe charts her uncertain way forward through a thrilling but troubling new love affair, she becomes enmeshed in the past of Thérèse Bell, an elderly Frenchwoman who wants to sell her collection of designer suits and couture gowns. Coming unexpectedly upon an old, painstakingly preserved child's coat in her new friend's wardrobe, Phoebe unlocks a secret that Thérèse has not shared with anyone since her girlhood in Nazi-occupied France.

With several storylines offering a riveting blend of romance, heartbreak, and humor—to say nothing of its delightful descriptions of fashion from the 1920s through the 1980s—*A Vintage Affair* is vividly colored with endearing characters and lovingly stitched with human sympathy. Readers will find it a perfect fit.

An Excerpt from *A Vintage Affair*

I stroked the gossamer chiffon of a 1950's peignoir. "What I really love about them ... is the fact that they contain someone's personal history." I ran the marabou trim across the back of my hand. "I find myself wondering about the women who wore them."

"Really?"

"I find myself wondering about their lives. I can never look at a garment—like this suit"—I went over to the day-wear rack and pulled out a 1940s fitted jacket and skirt in a dark blue tweed—"without thinking about the woman who owned it. How old was she? Did she work? Was she married? Was she happy?" Dan shrugged. "The suit has a British label from the early forties," I went on, "so I wonder what happened to this woman during the war. Did her husband survive? Did *she* survive?"

About the Author

A Vintage Affair is Isabel Wolff's eighth novel—an accomplishment the bestselling author herself finds surprising. While pursuing her career as a reporter with the BBC World Service, the veteran journalist also penned dozens of freelance features for such publications as the *Evening Standard* and the *Spectator*. But when the *Daily Telegraph* commissioned her to write a comic column about a woman named Tiffany Trott, she had no inkling that within a month she would have a deal to turn Tiffany's



adventures—or rather misadventures—into a book. Wolff explains, "To my amazement, HarperCollins then wanted another book, and another, and another and so somehow, without ever having set out to be a novelist, here I am."

Wolff's reportorial acumen is put to good use in revealing the heartbreaks and hopes of her newest heroine, Phoebe Swift, and Phoebe's friend, Thérèse, whose history of love and loss is woven through the pages of *A Vintage Affair*. "I think the best author has the sharpeye of a reporter combined with an understanding heart and a comprehension of the way people are," says

Wolff. Tempering her astute attentions to her characters' faults with a generous measure of compassion, Wolff animates her novel as well with her obvious delight in the details of vintage garments and the stories they tell.

Isabel Wolff lives in London with her partner, Greg, their five-year-old daughter, Alice, and two-year-old son, Edmund. When she's not writing, Wolff enjoys digging in the sandpit and going down the slide. She also plays piano, tennis, and foosball.

Get the most out of *A Vintage Affair* with these reading group discussion questions.

1. Phoebe feels personally responsible for the death of her best friend Emma. Do you think she's being too hard on herself?
2. Phoebe broke off her engagement to Guy quickly and resolutely, despite his attempts to contact her to try and work it out. Did she make the right decision?
3. How does her growing friendship with Dan Robinson, the charming yet somewhat absent-minded journalist, help Phoebe discover her own faults?
4. Did Miles Archant's willful blindness to his daughter's troubles make it impossible for him to have a fulfilling relationship with Phoebe, or any other woman? Did you find Miles more interesting than Dan as a potential partner for Phoebe?
5. Thérèse Bell is a complex character. Yet despite their very different histories, she and Phoebe share a defining character trait. How do the two women help each other grow and find peace?
6. Isabel Wolff did copious research to get the details of vintage clothing just right. Did such rich descriptions of fabrics and period styles contribute to your interest in the narrative?
7. While Phoebe's first-person voice drives the novel, it is Thérèse's story that encourages change and redemption. Is it fair to say that the latter is as important as the main plot line?
8. Were you surprised by any of Phoebe's choices as the book progressed? Would you have done anything differently?
9. Was it right for Phoebe to push Thérèse to tell her story? Did the outcome have as great an effect on Thérèse as it did on Phoebe?

Further Reading:

LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE By Ilene Beckerman

THE LOST ART OF KEEPING SECRETS By Eva Rice

FAMILY ALBUM By Penelope Lively

PATTY JANE'S HOUSE OF CURL By Lorna Landvik

TWENTIES GIRL By Sophie Kinsella

FROM OUR BOOKSELLERS

Praise for *A Vintage Affair*

"It kept me reading for three days straight. Isabel Wolff opened up a new world for me and even piqued my interest in vintage clothes."

Pam Milek, Houston, TX

"*A Vintage Affair* is so much more than 'chick lit.' A beautifully written book, both heartbreaking and hopeful. I couldn't put it down."

Vera Musella, Carle Place, NY

"As unique and well put together as the clothing it describes. The only thing that could have made this book better is if it came with a 'cupcake dress.'"

Stacie Dowdy, Charlottesville, VA

"I want to share it with my mother, my sisters, and my friends. And don't even get me started on the vintage clothes! Lovely!"

Amy Abst, Duluth, MN

Praise for Previous Barnes & Noble Recommends Main Selections

"With Niagara Falls as the backdrop, this intelligent tale of a woman's strength, and the riverman whose bravery and passion sweep her away, is an unforgettable story of love and family, greed and hardship. Not to be missed!"

Margie Turkett, Annapolis, MD

on The Day the Falls Stood Still

"Howe hit the perfect balance between spine-tingling thriller and thoughtful questioning of the Salem witch trials. I couldn't, and didn't, put it down."

Doug Britt, Chicago, IL

on The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane

"What a story! The war, the possibility of romance in the most unlikely of places, and best of all, the glowing love of reading and of books—all of it wrapped up in such lovely, unpretentious prose that after every chapter I wanted to hand it to strangers."

Steve Donoghue, Boston, MA

on The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society

"Like the proverbial onion, this story has so many layers which reveal glimpses of the dark side of humanity ... both compelling and repellant at the same time."

Catherine Wareham, Blaine, MN

on The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

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— *A Vintage Affair* —

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