



Shining Through

Susan Isaacs

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It's 1940 and Linda Voss, legal secretary extraordinaire, has a secret. She's head over heels in love with her boss, John Berringer, the pride of the Ivy League. Not that she even has a chance--he'd never take a second look at a German-Jewish girl from Queens who spends her time taking care of her faded beauty of a mother and following bulletins on the war in Europe. For Linda, though, the war will soon become all too real. Engulfing her nation and her life, it will offer opportunities she's never dreamed of. A chance to win the man she wants...a chance to find the love she deserves.

Made into the movie of the same name starring Melanie Griffith, Michael Douglas, and Liam Neeson, *Shining Through* is a novel of honor, sacrifice, passion, and humor. This is vintage Susan Isaacs, a tale of a spirited woman who wisecracks her way into heroism and history--and into your heart.

Shining Through Details

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Author : Susan Isaacs

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From Reader Review Shining Through for online ebook

Jennifer says

Not a horrible read once I got about 50 or so pages into it, but up until then I was pretty bored. Ultimately I guess I didn't really care that much for the heroine, nor her voice as narrator.

I felt like the book had an identity crisis. At first you just see a fairly smart girl with a hopeless crush, then you wade through a foolish office romance, then you take a deeper look into romantic and familial relationships, then suddenly you're reading an adventure/spy novel, and finally it turns out it's just a romance after all. Peppered throughout all of this are details about WWII, often incongruous with the surrounding material, but eventually more central to the plot.

Katie says

The story is narrated by Linda Voss, a sassy and smart secretary from Queens who works for a top Wall Street law firm. She falls madly in love with her boss, John Berringer, and after his divorce, becomes his next conquest. Through John, she meets Ed Leland, a lawyer who also works in counterintelligence. When the U.S. becomes involved in the war, Linda is compelled to do everything she can to help, partly due to the fact that she is half Jewish, so she takes a job as Ed's secretarial translator. Using her German skills as leverage, she becomes a spy and gains employment in a top Nazi's home. The author writes in a gossipy style, with witty and humorous dialogue. While the plot is mildly entertaining, I feel that overall it is cheesy and unrealistic. The book reads like it is one step up from a Danielle Steel novel, which while fun once in awhile, is definitely not my thing. I recommend this to lovers of chick lit only, if you're looking for serious WWII fiction, stay far away.

Michelle says

I don't normally write reviews, but I LOVE this book. I have read it several times over the years, and it is always like I picked it up fresh. The writing style is fun, the character is who I wish I could be, the characters are great and the ending is unpredictable. Love Susan Isaacs, and this is my fav

Margaret says

What happens when Cinderella gets her prince? More than you'd think, in this wonderful WWII historical novel -- part romance, part spy thriller -- by Susan Isaacs, one of my favorite writers (this is her only historical; her others are contemporary).

Linda Voss is a thirtyish, half-Jewish secretary in a New York law firm, madly in love with her boss, John Berringer, who's married to Nan Leland, the daughter of Edward Leland, a senior partner in the law firm. When Nan leaves John for another man, Linda's dream comes true...and that's just the beginning of the story.

One of the book's main charms is Linda's forthright, determined, funny personality, which comes through clearly in her first-person narration; this is no shrinking violet of a fairy tale princess Cinderella. Isaacs has a

gift for outspoken, feisty heroines, and Linda is one of her best. Sure, the plot is a little unbelievable at times, but Linda's journey from starry-eyed secretary to wartime spy makes for truly compulsive reading.

Jeri says

A wonderful book. Forgot that I loved it until Jennifer Wiener reminded me. And hubba hubba, Michael Douglas in the movie version is hot, hot, hot!

Lesli says

Compromising Positions was Susan Isaacs' first novel. She's since written many since then. All of them are entertaining. A couple have been made into pretty bad movies. My favorites are Compromising Positions, Close Relations, Almost Paradise, and Shining Through, which is really worth reading. It's interesting and entertaining and contains one of the best opening paragraphs (3 paragraphs to be exact) that I've ever read. I've quoted them below.

In 1940, when I was thirty-one and an old maid, while the whole world waited for war, I fell in love with John Berringer.

An office crush. Big deal. Since the invention of the steno pad, a day hasn't gone by without some secretary glancing up from her Pitman squiggles and suddenly realizing that the man who was mumbling "...and therefore, pursuant to the above..." was the only man in her life who could ever bring her joy.

So there I was, a cliché with a number 2 yellow pencil; a working girl from Queens who'd lost her heart to the pride of the Ivy League.

Sandy says

Linda Voss is the narrator of her own story as a bilingual (English/German) secretary from Queens in a Wall Street law firm in 1940. At age 31, she considers herself an "old maid" with no regrets for turning down early marriage proposals, but clinging to a fantasy love for her brilliant, elegant, gorgeous (and married) boss, John Berringer -- a secret she shares with nobody, not even her closest friend. John's father-in-law, WWI war hero Edward Leland, is a well-respected member of the firm who takes an interest in Linda's unique skills, and gradually develops a working relationship with her that leads to espionage work.

It is Linda's wit and sassy humor in the snappy dialogue that really makes this a tremendous pleasure to read. She hides her deceased father's Jewish heritage because of the rampant anti-Semitism of her working world, and because his family was never religious anyway. Having grown up with a German-speaking grandmother who never stopped longing to return to her home country, Linda knows more about Europe than most Americans and follows the news of Hitler's advances with more awareness and concern than anyone else of her acquaintance. (The other secretaries tease her about her obsession with politics).

Complicated relationships -- working and romantic -- thread through Linda's adventures, first at the law firm, and eventually in Washington, DC, where a new, secret agency (precursor to the CIA) needs her linguistic and analytical skills to get real intelligence on what's happening in Germany, especially after Pearl Harbor and war is declared. Linda has her weak spots (John Berringer, for one -- it takes an agonizingly long time for her to realize he is unworthy of her!), but it's her intelligence, backbone, and calmness even when she is inwardly terrified that makes her such a likable character... and such a perfect spy!

The story gives a vivid picture of life and social strata in 1940 New York City -- from the high-end wheeler-dealers of Manhattan to the blue collar world of Queens (where Linda lives with her alcoholic mother). And when Linda ends up in Berlin, we see through her eyes the contrast in cultures, as well as the terrors of war on a populace.

I don't want to spoil the ending for anyone, so let's just say.... it made me smile.

Ann-Marie says

I read this because when I was younger I was a fan of the film starring Melanie Griffith, Michael Douglas, and Liam Neeson. I knew it was based on this book by Susan Isaacs and for years this has been on my to-read list. Now I've finally read it and...meh. I wish I could've loved it, or more specifically I wish it could've been more like the film. That's what I saw first and that's the story I fell in love with. This one? Nope.

The main character, Linda Voss, wasn't as likable. She had her moments, but then she'd make some stupid decisions that were frustrating. I felt bad for her though, with the tough family life she had and the bad choices in men. She was supposed to be this smart, sassy, and strong heroine, but she didn't really live up to any of that in my mind.

The last part of the book was a little more reminiscent of the film but it still wasn't enough of a great read for me. It took too long to get to the spy adventure part (which didn't seem as intense like I thought it would be) and the romance wasn't as sweet either. In the end, for a moment I thought, maybe. Not as touching as the film's, but still, kinda sweet. Then a certain confession was said by Linda's love interest and I was like, never mind.

So if you've seen the film and liked it, stick with that. If you haven't, then you could go into this book if you want without bias. But it's not one that I would recommend to friends.

Jen says

Full Disclosure: This was one of my favorite comfort books (reread regularly) when I was in my early 20s and I thought it was time for a re-read. So, the five stars are because this book has been so loved. It is not a masterpiece, it does feel just a slight bit dated in some of the attitudes but the story is so fabulous. Isaacs knows how to spin a yarn, shape characters and give them distinctive, compelling voices and the story here is fantastic (would I like an extra chapter to see that first Thanksgiving hinted at on the last page, you bet, but I always long for epilogues). PAY NO ATTENTION TO THE MOVIE, which has only the barest minimums to do with the book.

Kate Quinn says

Oh, what a book, and oh, what a heroine. There's nobody quite like Linda; a Jewish-German secretary from Queens with a foul mouth, a wry sense of humor, and enough steel in her spine to build a bridge cable. Linda works for movie-star-handsome Wall Street lawyer John, fantasizing about her boss by day and taking care of her alcoholic mother by night, as Hitler rises in Europe. A passionate love affair and an unplanned pregnancy lead to a marriage proposal from John, but this fairy tale doesn't end at the altar. Marrying John

isn't quite the happy ending Linda imagined, and when John's intimidating boss Edward needs a German speaker to handle his secret war correspondence, Linda jumps at the job. From the fringes of the spy business, Linda will land right in the thick of it, sent to Berlin to spy on a Nazi official as D-Day approaches. Linda's unforgettable voice makes the book fly, but the tense and terrifying third act is where it really soars; painting a mesmerizing picture of Hitler's Berlin, the intelligence business (the real intel business, not the James Bond stuff), and of an ordinary woman gutting her way through impossible dangers on common sense and sheer toughness alone. "I wanted to fight as much as any boy who enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor," she tells us, and boy, does she. Note: a movie was made of this book starring Michael Douglas and Melanie Griffith. It sucks.

Dixie Swanson says

GREAT READ. This is the story of a bilingual German-English secretary in New York at the outbreak of WWII. She was in love with her boss, "a cliché with a #2 pencil." She ends up in Berlin as a cook/spy in a high-placed Nazi's house. You will stand up and cheer at the climax of the book. I'd read the phone book is Susan Isaacs wrote it.

Beth says

I've read this several times, seen the movie , and have this on tape. The movie is good, but doesn't follow the book. The absolute best book and audio book ever.

You won't believe how good Stockard Channing is as the book's reader for the audio book. She's witty and snappy, just like the main character in the book.

Melanie Griffith was so wrong for the part it was unbelievable. She has a baby voice, which couldn't be further from the author's wishes.

Lynn Spencer says

First of all, I have to say that this book is almost NOTHING like the movie. It is way, way better. Even though I didn't always like the narrator, Linda Voss, I did love her story. **Shining Through** is a great big sprawling saga of a 30-something Jewish secretary from Queens. She starts off having a crush on her uber-WASP boss at the law firm. Her knowledge of German and his focus on international law lead Linda down some interesting, if not entirely easy roads.

Those who have seen the movie will primarily remember the WWII German spy plot. That is a part of this book and it is very exciting stuff, but where the spy plot dominates the movie, there is sooo much more going on in the book. It's fair to say that Linda dominates the book. As we follow her adventures, we get to see Linda learn much about the world and herself, some of it good and some of it heart-breaking. There are a few draggy places, but overall it's quite a ride.

Dlora says

Set in the 1940s, this novel shows us the divide in the business world between women's role as secretaries and companions and the men's role as lawyers and thinkers. Women aren't given much credit for an ability to think. The main character, Linda Voss, breaks through that mold, obsessed with the rise of Hitler and making perspicacious conclusions about his impact on Europe and the world. But none of the women want to listen to that (they are more interested in gossip and fashion) and the men won't listen either (women are for sex not political insights). I was glad to leave that behind, as Linda's ability to speak German allows her to help with the US spy effort as a translator and then as an actual spy in Germany toward the end of the war. We move out of the realm of gossipy sex talk and adultery into heroism, nobility, and the gritty details of an undercover life in Germany. (I really hated all of the focus on sex and passion.) Linda is supposedly "naturally lighthearted," she didn't like grimness and appreciated a quality of fun, but the novel had very little lightheartedness and fun; it was grim. And, well yes, World War II was a grim time.

One theme surfacing throughout the book (that added to the grimness) was the idea of classes. In Europe, a person is born into a class; but supposedly in the United States, we have done away with class structure. However, Linda felt oppressed with her station in life, struggling to fit into the upper classes formed by riches, family connections, and education. She never felt she fit in despite her intelligence and moving from poverty to the monied class. However, while in Germany, she realized "in a world of barbarians, the light of simple human decency is so overwhelming, so blinding, that you no longer see things like old silver and Yale and fancy accents."

The writing and story line is good. I was intrigued with this idea: "If a man has some pleasure in one half of his life--home, work--he can usually take pretty much what the other half has to dish out." And I recognized this state in myself at times: "I was overtired the way a little kid gets: clumsy, and so irritable I felt on the verge of tears."

Although the book was stellar in the last quarter, I gave it low stars for the overabundance of sexual content and also the grimness and lack of hope throughout. This was a coming of age story with Linda finding and understanding herself and valuing the right things in life, but it took so long to get there and I didn't like the journey.

Deb says

Nazis, spys, trains, romance, suspense. What more need I say? This book was good! And I loved the movie. when they play "I'll be seeing you" and Melanie Griffith sees Michael Douglas with another woman. She didn't act like it didn't bother her, she was just honest and had tears in her eyes. It brings to mind that quote from "Sound of Music" There's nothing more irresistible to a man than a woman who's in love with him. Don't know if it's true, but it ought to be.

Donna Davis says

On the whole, I don't read a lot of love stories. I guess I usually find them corny and overly sentimental.

I read Susan Isaacs because she doesn't just write love stories; she writes amazing fiction. Most of her tales

are set in the present, but this wonderful little dose of historical fiction was just right for me. It's Isaacs at her best, which means excellent writing.

One of the things I like about her premises (in general) is that she favors either the working class woman, or a woman scorned seeking revenge. Either way she plays it, she does it with vigor and a snappy sense of humor.

This particular story is set during World War II. The protagonist is a dirt-poor secretary with a splendid work ethic. What unfolds, I will leave to the reader to enjoy. As usual, though, Isaacs runs a tight plot despite the thicker-than-average length. She keeps it playing out more and more rapidly, but keeps the cast of characters manageable, so we don't lose track. She keeps events linear, which is much appreciated, especially by those of us who read more than one book at a time.

This is a good time for me to do a search and see if she has written anything I haven't yet read. Loads of fun, as usual!

Rosario (<http://rosario.blogspot.com/>) says

I discovered *Shining Through* in my late teens/early twenties, and read it again and again and again. I reread it again this year after not going back to it for quite a while (I don't have a review of it on the blog, which suggests I hadn't reread it since 2002. That can't be right, surely? I guess I stopped rereading frequently since I started my switch to ebooks). I'm always a little bit worried when I do that, afraid that the book won't be quite as amazing as I remember, or that it might have aged badly. I shouldn't have worried. *Shining Through* has held up wonderfully.

If at all possible, I would suggest reading this without knowing much about the plot and where it's going, so I'm going to try not to go into too much detail. The story takes place in the early 40s and it's about Linda Voss, a young Jewish woman from Queens. Linda doesn't quite fit in. Girls like her are supposed to go to secretarial school and then just get a job until they get married. Linda did go to secretarial school and got a job at an uptown law firm, but marriage to the men she met never quite felt right. Now she's an old maid, for the standards of the day (31!).

Linda also feels a sense of dissatisfaction with her life. She has nothing in common with the people she works with and lives with. None of them thinks what's going on in Europe has anything to do with them, while she obsessively follows the news and worries. The other secretaries would much rather gossip about the private lives of the partners in the law firm. Linda doesn't care.

Well, actually, she does care about the private life of one of the partners, the very one she works for. Because for all that she's different from the other secretaries, she has managed to become that old cliché, the secretary who's in love with her boss. John Berringer is handsome and cultured and very Ivy League. Linda pictures them gazing into each other's eyes while discussing the war in Europe, him taking her very seriously. Unfortunately, John is married, and to a woman just as Ivy League as himself.

But Linda's life is soon to be shaken up. She will get everything she thought she wanted and discover it's not quite what she expected. She'll also be pulled into the war effort in a way she would never ever have predicted.

This is a story full of memorable characters, drama and adventure. Best of all, there's just as much drama and adventure in the more domestic portions of the story as there is in the non-domestic ones. I also particularly

loved the sense of place and time. Is it accurate? I don't really know. I do know it feels real and it's wonderfully vivid.

There are several elements that made this such a favourite for me. First, Linda Voss is one of my favourite characters ever. She's intelligent and funny and brave. I loved her self-awareness, and I also loved how that wasn't perfect and she sometimes managed to blind herself to what was in front of her (Isaacs is good at making sure the reader can see more clearly than her, while not making Linda come across as stupid). She felt real to me, and I loved her. I felt happy with her and felt crushed when she felt crushed. I was terrified for her and felt triumphant with her. I wanted her to be happy.

And this brings me to the romance. I don't want to say much about it, just that although we don't see a great deal of it, it's absolutely perfect and these two people are exactly right for each other. Sometimes it's good to be left wanting more.

The final thing that I adore about this book is the writing. It's narrated from Linda's point of view and her voice feels just right. Isaacs writing is brilliant. She creates characters that feel real, even the tiny secondary ones, and there were many little details and images in this book that stayed in my mind for years. As I reread it this time, I looked forward to old favourites. Isaacs is one of the very few authors, if not the only one, whose voice is so compelling that I would honestly be happy to read her shopping list.

I'm very glad I went back to this book, and I suspect it's going to be reread again soon. I will definitely be rereading other books of Isaacs' soon.

MY GRADE: An A+.

NOTE: The book was made into a 1992 film starring Michael Douglas, Melanie Griffith and Liam Neeson. If you watched it, don't let this put you off. This film differed substantially from the book and, IMO, wasn't anywhere near as good.

Elinor says

This has been on my wartime reading list for a while, so I decided to tackle it before the year ends. In the past I've enjoyed the wildly popular, often humorous fiction by this author, so I was curious to see how she handled her first foray into historical fiction.

It was the usual quick, entertaining read. My criticism is the timing -- more than half of the book concerns the heroine's affair with her boss in New York. It isn't until WELL into the story that she suddenly, shockingly, (and somewhat unbelievably) becomes a spy in Berlin. It's almost as if the author got tired of writing about affairs of the heart and jumped into a completely different story.

This book was written in 1988 and turned into a movie a few years later with Melanie Griffiths, of all people. I'd like to see if the screenplay made it a more cohesive story. (And one more thing -- I didn't like the title. I don't know who or what was shining through.)

I never review a book on Goodreads that I think is worth less than four stars. If the whole book had been about her spy adventures, it would have deserved five stars.

Elhara says

If I have to know where my book is all the time I rate it a 5. Because the personality of the main character is quite unique, I didn't know what she was going to do next. I suppose some of the story line is somewhat predictable but I was so entranced in reading the words right in front of me I really didn't speculate the course of what was to come.

I enjoy books set in WWII. For all it's hideous nature, it was a time that found ordinary people thinking about how they could aid the war effort. Espionage wasn't a common part to play, but it must have been a boost to moral to think that there amongst their neighbours, family and friends, seemingly average citizens, there were those who did.

This story is a light read with mainly references to war atrocities but Ms Isaacs' writings still were able to capture the horror of this time.

Laura says

This is one of the most boring books I've ever read! The movie, however, is soooo much better and one of my favorites. I saw the movie first and then decided to read the book and I'm glad I did because if I'd read the book first, I probably would have never seen the movie. It was like the director read the book. liked the premise of the book but had to totally rewrite the script to make the movie much more interesting. I highly recommend the movie! The book -- not so much!
