



## Finding Emilie

*Laurel Corona*

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## **Finding Emilie** Laurel Corona

*Woman is born free, and everywhere she is in corsets. . . .*

Lili du Châtelet yearns to know more about her mother, the brilliant French mathematician Emilie. But the shrouded details of Emilie's unconventional life—and her sudden death—are elusive. Caught between the confines of a convent upbringing and the intrigues of the Versailles court, Lili blossoms under the care of a Parisian salonnier as she absorbs the excitement of the Enlightenment, even as the scandalous shadow of her mother's past haunts her and puts her on her own path of self-discovery.

Laurel Corona's breathtaking new novel, set on the eve of the French Revolution, vividly illuminates the tensions of the times, and the dangerous dance between the need to conform and the desire to chart one's own destiny and journey of the heart.

## **Finding Emilie Details**

Date : Published (first published April 12th 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Laurel Corona

Format : Kindle Edition 448 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, France, Fiction, Literature, 18th Century, European History, French Revolution

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## From Reader Review Finding Emilie for online ebook

### Mary (BookHounds) says

This is a wonderful historical fiction novel that details the age of Enlightenment, an intellectual revolution that occurred in France during the late 1700's and the Revolution.. The story revolves around Lili, who is taken in by the de Bercy family after his mother dies while she is an infant. Lili's mother, ahead of her time, was a mathematician and lived an unconventional life. Lili tries to discover her mother's secrets and shows her intelligence at a time when women are to be seen and not heard. Corona does an excellent job portraying society in pre-revolutionary France while describing the consequences of going against the community.

This story also will have you enjoying math and physics and the author works them in seamlessly. I was really intrigued with some of the ideas put forth in the novel and probably spent way too much time looking them up. I found it interesting that Lili's tale really comes alive through the Meadowlark stories that appear throughout the book. The end of the book contains the completed works. If you enjoy Philippa Gregory and Jean Plaidy, you will love this one!

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### Bookaholics says

Finding Emilie by Laurel Corona  
Historical Romance -April 12th, 2011  
4 stars

In the 1750's, Lili du Chatelet grew up not knowing much about her mother, the fiery and controversial Emili du Chatelet. Taken in by Madame de Bercy, her mother's close friend, Lili passed her childhood years with Delphine de Bercy. Years pass as they must learn to navigate the treacherous waters of the French court, the rigidity of social norms, and the social expectations while finding happiness...

Less of a romance novel, but more of a historical, Finding Emilie is a rich novel about a young girl's journey in life. Lili is highly intelligent and yet, because of her gender, she is expected to not voice her opinions or ideas. Madame de Bercy tries to cultivate her philosophical side by encouraging Lili to attend salons and introducing Lili to thinkers and scientists. As Lili gets older, she, too, longs to express herself even though the strict Parisian nobility disapproves. Highly detailed and vibrant, this novel reminds me of the movie Marie Antoinette. Finding Emilie is full of insights into the lonely and difficult existence of a woman in that era, especially when the woman is intelligent and unwilling to settle for a normal, shallow existence. Lili must find the courage to be herself and not conform to what society demands.

Thought provoking and full of bittersweet moments, Finding Emilie is a must read for historical drama lovers.

Reviewed by Pauline from the Bookaholics Romance Club

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## **Annette says**

“On September 3, 1749, shortly before her forty-third birthday, Gabrielle-Emilie le Tonnelier de Breteuil, the Marquise du Chatelet, gave birth to a baby girl, Stanislas-Adelaide. Six days later, already back at her translation of and commentary on Newton’s Principia Mathematica, Emilie du Chatelet complained of a headache, and within hours this charismatic and brilliant woman of letters was dead. This is a work of fiction about the daughter she left behind.”

“Historical records indicate that she (the daughter, Lili) died of unknown causes before her second birthday.” The story of Lili is a pure fiction.

The story alternates between two times: when the mother Emilie is alive, a brilliant woman translating work of Newton and having an affair with Voltaire; and Lili growing up in a convent and also under a supervision of her godmother, exposed to the thinkers of her time and encouraged not to just follow what convent imposes, but to use her own judgement.

It sounds as it should be a very interesting read, but the story and characters are flat. I felt no connection to the story or characters.

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## **Marialyce says**

The premise of the book is wonderful and floats back and forth between the life of Emilie De Chatelet and her illegitimate daughter Lili. Emilie, a brilliant woman was the mistress of Voltaire and although he was not Lili's father, the author has the two meet and share knowledge and stories of her mother. Emilie died in childbirth having Lili and in real life so did Lili, but this book explores the "what if" factor, that of Lili surviving and facing her life under the reign of Louis XV. While the story might have followed Emilie, it more follows the life that might have been for her daughter who was wonderfully raised by her godmother, exposed to the thinkers of the day, encouraged to use her marvelous intelligence, and lived with her godmother and her daughter, Delphine.

The characters created by Ms Carona were charming and one could not help but feel for Lili as she comes of age wanting to know about her mother, a brilliant woman who rewrote Newton's principles so that people would understand it better. Lili battles against the times where women certainly were looked upon as brainless playthings forced into corsets and made to prance around for men's enjoyment. Lili, intelligent and questioning all, with a huge desire for knowledge attracts the attention of her convent sisters and is punished for being bright and not accepting everything on face value. She is rescued by her godmother and enjoys life at her godmother's salon where she is free to ask and explore science and philosophy without the religious constraints of the time.

Life has its many challenges in this French aristocratic society and Lili battles and establishes herself as a charming intelligent woman. An arranged marriage is averted and Lili ends up with a man who shares her desire to know and learn so the ending is a happy one.

I was disappointed however, in the lack of story involving Emilie. Of course this was fiction so the author had free reign to explore the possibility of Lili living and coming of age in a world where women were

second class citizens. The book was engaging but in the end it tended to be female fiction while I wanted the more historical aspect of historical fiction.

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### **Audra (Unabridged Chick) says**

Won this in a GoodReads giveaway but passed it on during the book purge of 2014. Dying to read, however, and will have to pick it up from the library sometime soon. I love hist fic that features unusual historical figures!

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### **Julie Smith (Knitting and Sundries) says**

This review first appeared on my blog: <http://www.knittingandsundries.com/20...>

In real life, Emilie du Chatelet, married to one man, long-time mistress and friend of Voltaire, gave birth to Stanislas Adelaide (Lili), child of yet another of her affairs, at the age of 43 and died 6 days later from a sudden illness. Lili died before her second birthday.

This novel is a fictionalized account of Lili's life had she lived, growing up with her godmother Julie de Bercy, who was in the house when Emilie died, pregnant with her own daughter Delphine. Her father pays a living stipend, but never visits, and her progress is monitored by her father's sister-in-law, Baronne Lomont, a strict adherent to society's protocols.

Lili is loyal, questing, and intelligent in an age when female intelligence and knowledge is still an affront to a proper society - a society where only the working class, not nobles, pay taxes, and she is shielded from the knowledge of her true parentage and her mother's scandalous life.

Lili's scientific mind and refusal to simply "be satisfied with being ordinary" are at the center of this novel. In her search to find her mother's story, she finds herself as well.

QUOTE: "I've tried to explain to her that her intelligence was charming on a girl, but not in a young lady. I've told her more than once that no man of quality will choose to marry someone whose head is buried in a book all day and every time she insists she'd rather have the book than the man"

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### **Farin says**

It is 1749, and brilliant and scandalous scientist and mathematician Emilie du Châtelet dies suddenly, and only a week after giving birth. Her daughter, Lili, is sent away to be raised by Julie de Bercy and the strict Baronne Lomont. *Finding Emilie* is told through Lili's eyes, and as she navigates through a changing society during the era of the Enlightenment, she discovers her mother's rich intellectual and philosophical legacy and uses it to take hold of her own life.

*Finding Emilie* is my favorite kind of historical fiction novel. Laurel Corona explains in her introduction that her aim as a historical fiction writer is to answer the question of "What might have happened?" while keeping as true to the period as possible, and she does exactly that. The oppression Emilie and Lili felt as

intelligent and questioning thinkers in an era where women were expected to be little more than sparkling ornaments was palpable, and I loved the various foils that Ms. Corona created, both human (Lili and her foster sister Delphine, who conformed a bit more to society's expectations) and atmospheric (the rigid atmosphere of the convent vs. the enlightened discussions at Julie de Bercy's *salon*, the darkness of Baronne Lomont's home vs. the freedom at the Jardin de Roi). The ideas and discoveries of the Enlightenment are introduced into the narrative by the philosophers and scientists themselves, which serves the dual purpose of teaching the reader something new while giving the lesson great context and color. I also liked that Ms. Corona tempered the moments of reversal with the characters' various gains so that I got the feeling of suspense without getting frustrated by a constant storm of bad news.

Lili reminded me a bit of Harry Potter at points. Like Harry, Lili had a brilliant and famous parent who died tragically but left a network of supportive people behind who loved her, first because she was Emilie's child but then because of the bright and sensitive person she became in her own right. Also like Harry, Lili had to lose her safety nets (and cruelly) before she could come to terms with her past and live her life. And like Harry, I was fully invested in Lili's story and rooted for her every step of the way.

I enjoyed every second of *Finding Emilie*, from the opening sentences to the supplemental fairy tale/satire at the back, and I highly recommend it.

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### **Beth says**

Just finished the book! Review to come :)

Okay, review time! *Finding Emilie* is officially one of my favorite books of 2011 and by far my favorite historical novel that I've read thus far. The story is not complex, but Corona tells it in a way that really captured my interest. It's her imagining of the life of Lili du Chatelet, daughter of mathematician Emilie du Chatelet. It is definitely a "girl power" book, which I really enjoyed. 18th Century France doesn't allow women many privileges, and throughout the story, we see how Lili overcomes those circumstances to live a life where she can be truly happy, but also live a life that strives to be happy no matter what the circumstances are; choosing to be happy sometimes makes all the difference.

One interesting thing about this novel is that the prologue comes all in the form of letters, either from Julie de Bercy (Lili "foster-mother") and Baroness Lomont (Lili's official guardian). I thought it was a great way to set up the differences in worldview of both of those characters and also the opposing views they held of Emilie. Interspersed throughout the novel are letters from Emilie to various others and also parts of her story. Sometime we find out more about Emilie than Lili knows, which makes Lili's journey all the more important.

I loved the characters of the novel. Lili was great, of course, and I loved the relationship between her and her adopted sister, Delphine. They are opposites in many ways, but still greatly care about each other. Julie De Bercy was also a terrific character. It is admirable to think that there were real women like her who still managed to have worthwhile discussions with the brilliant minds of the time without being ostracized for it elsewhere.

I can't imagine living in a time where everything was so controlled by an elite few and where women have so little power. Reputation was everything, whether what is said was true or not. In that time it really could mean life or death, and even if the death wasn't physical, it certainly could be a death of free will and choice.

The scientific and philosophical discussions in the novel were not boring or heavy handed either. They were quite interesting and helped advance the plot. I also fully expected that none of these great thinkers would discuss God, but I was mistaken. As Emilie says, "Science is really the purest form of beauty. Through study, we can come to see God's hand, and I for one want to do that."

And call me cheesy, but I like that the book has a good ending. Life certainly isn't perfect, and Lili raises the issue of being a mother and still pursuing her studies, which I found I could relate to as a woman who hopes to be a mother some day. Overall though, it is a "happy" ending.

Highly recommended!

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### **Maia B. says**

My expectations really were not very high for this book. It looked vaguely interesting but not as if it were written especially well (the writing is mediocre), and I already doubt the merit any book that claims its main character "blossoms," under care or anything else. But I kept seeing it in bookstores and someone recommended it to me and before you know it, I somehow bought a copy and it made its way to the top of my "to-read" stack. And, since I'd promised myself I would read it, I did.

First, I have no idea why it says on the back of the book that Lili "yearns to know more" about her mother. She doesn't. She doesn't even think about her much until less than a hundred pages from the end. Emilie doesn't seem to have influenced her life all that much, until Lili actually needs her father to do something for her, and Lili does not "find" her. She doesn't know a whole lot more about her at the end of the book than she does at the beginning. So a very different title might have been much more effective - in fact, would have been.

Enough with griping about the title. This is historical fiction that might have been set almost any other place and time - England in the early 1900s, for example. There is very little insight into pre-Revolution France and even less into the scientific and mathematical discoveries of the time. Make Emilie the lover of Lord Byron instead, change the names and a few details and the book would perfectly transpose into England. Since I like the setting in a historical fiction novel to have a pretty big impact on the novel itself, this really disappointed me, especially since I was looking forward to reading a book set in France that has almost zero to do with the Revolution. I have read one other book set in France that has zero to do with the Revolution. One! And then this one didn't really have anything to do with the history of France at the time. Very disappointing.

It's a nice story of two girls growing up, though, with some nice romance sprinkled in, and the plot is interesting and I really like that Lili vanquishes the evil Baronne Lomont at the end. It was a lot of fun to read about Delphine and Lili and their exploits; the book certainly held my attention.

Well...most of the book. It's split between telling the story of Lili and that of her mother, Emilie du Chatelet, one chapter devoted to Lili, the next to Emilie, and so on, and I found myself flipping pages to see how much longer Emilie's section lasted. Emile herself bored me to tears and there were enormous gaps in the stories - she's ten, she's fifteen, she's twenty-seven and married with children. She meets Voltaire - in the next chapter they are lovers. If I hadn't known already that this was going to happen I would have been completely astonished. It is an extremely underdeveloped relationship and Emilie as a character is so dull it was painful

to read her chapters.

Interesting plot? Yes. Interesting (most of them) characters? Yes. Happy ending? Yes. Character development? Sort of. Great literature? Definitely not. It's a light read, fun and absorbing. Good for carrying around with you to the train station and on airplanes. Or the beach. It is not a wonderful, marvelous book and it doesn't mean to be.

I like it.

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### **Tomi says**

Finding Emilie was a great tale of a young lady on a path of discovery as told through the eyes of a daughter and the mother she never knew. The story itself isn't complex but the manner in which author Laurel Corona intertwines the two stories is magnificent. What makes the story fascinating are the historical aspects. The story is fictional but if you're familiar with Corona's previous works you know she has a gift for mixing fiction and non-fiction.

I love how Lili comes into her own discontent with society's view that she should succumb to a life her spirit cannot accept. This is an empowering tale of a young woman who, for reasons neither she nor those close to her, can understand why she is drawn to question traditional societal roles. Along her journey she realizes she is more like the mother she never knew. It is through Lili's search we are introduced to the remarkably gifted scientist, Emilie du ChÂtelet, whose contributions to the world of science and free will as written in some of her earlier writings. du ChÂtelet died shortly after birthing a daughter and it is through Corona's imagination this daughter comes to life for us. The story is not autobiographical it is Corona's depiction of a life this daughter may have lived.

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### **Mommalibrarian says**

The amount of philosophical and scientific information and actual life of Emilie Du Chalet in this book is scarcely more than that in the liner notes. The amount of insight into the French 18th century would not fill a thimble. There were no surprising facts. What is left is a pleasant, feel-good story of two girls growing up together. Because of the tenor of the times and the controlling presence of the church women's lives were circumscribed. Our heroine, like her dead mother, chafes under this pressure to conform. Because of that it is also a book on women's issues. A quote from Emilie the brilliant and rebellious mother. "Judge me for my own merits, or lack of them, but do not look upon me as a mere appendage to this great general or that great scholar, this star that shines at the court of France or that famed author. I am in my own right a whole person, responsible to myself alone for all that I am, all that I say, all that I do." I do not think this book was written for young adults but I would recommend it for middle-schoolers and up if the idea of an affair does not offend them. It will be easily accessible. It is not literature.

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### **Diane says**

Austen meets Disney in 18th century France! No singing critters or cutlery, but there is a small monkey and

a pink orchid mantis, plus guest appearances by Voltaire and a French version of My Little Pony! WILL our sister-girls find true love and make happy marriages despite evil witches and predatory cads, etc? What do you think? Not sure why it isn't classified YA, although it would need some whittling down no doubt. Which would be good. It bogs down a bit in its ample midsection. Bonus: if you ever wondered how women maneuvered in dresses with panniers (those substantial hip bustles that look like personal side tables) here's your chance to find out.

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### **Nina Carboni says**

Loved it

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### **April says**

FINDING EMILIE by Laurel Corona is an interesting historical novel set in 1749 France. It is based on real French people such as Voltaire, LaBarre, Saint\_Lambert and Marquins de Chatelet, Emilie, a female mathematician who is not only scandalous but who was also brilliant. This story is set during the French Enlightenment and the pre French Revolution. It is a complicated story with multiple facet plots including the story of Emilie du Chatelet and her daughter, Lili. Emilie dies right after Lili is born, so Lili is sent to live with a friend of her mother's, but Emilie's husband's sister-in-law is in charge of Lili. Lili's life is full of surprises, mysterious journeys in search of the truth about her mother and her own happiness. In the end she finds she has a lot in common with her mother. She also finds a father who is not her father. A father who doesn't want her, friendships that last a life time, love, enduring and happiness. Along the way she learns more about her self and her mother. This is the story of self discovery, tensions of the times, dangerous path between the need to conform, the desire of one's destiny and the journey of one's heart. If you enjoy a good historical novel with facts on historical people, historical times and a great story than you will enjoy this one. Oh, did I forget to mention romance along the way. This book was received for the purpose of review from the publisher and details can be found at Gallery Books, a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc. and My Book Addiction and More.

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### **Lucy says**

Finding Emilie is a precious gem. I say this because rarely do I fall this much in love with a novel that is not totally the 'true' history. Laurel Corona's book has added to the history by writing a story about 'what might have been' and created a novel that captivated me in all of its beauty and prose.

Based on the lives of both Emilie du Chatelet (Voltaire's love) and (mostly) her daughter, Stanislas-Adelaide; known as Lili- the story takes you into the pre-Revolution time of the 18th c. This was a time in France where women were not supposed to dabble in the sciences and other 'higher' learning subjects-let alone write.

Emilie's death a few days after giving birth results in Lili being raised by Julie de Bercy (Emilie's close friend). Julie's daughter, Delphine and Lili are raised like sisters. Lili however presents herself as quite trying and out of the ordinary in terms of all her questioning at the convent where she and Delphine were schooled. Lili finds herself intrigued by her defunct mother and wants to find out more about her. Knowing that she resembles her not only physically, but also in spirit, Lili desperately wants answers for her own life through

‘finding Emilie’. This becomes a difficult task since her aunt is reluctant in sharing anything about Emilie’s remarkable life (she was the one who actually re-wrote Newton’s work! Anonymously...one can only imagine how deep her understanding and knowledge of the material stretched)- But Lili is adamant about finding out the truth about her mother.

Unlike her despicable aunt, Julie is a constant and wonderful support for Lili as she blossoms into a great philosophical writer and lover of science. Lili does publish her work, but because this was a time where women’s brains were not something deserving of praise or recognition, she does this under a pen name. I love that the author put this twist in history and added Lili’s life into it to give closure to what could have been a continuation to Emilie’s life. I almost bet you Emilie would have expected nothing less of this remarkably strong and intelligent daughter!

Bravo Laurel Corona!

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