



Garden of Stars

Rose Alexander

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The Alentejo, Portugal 1934

I am Inês Bretão and I am 18 years old. Now that I am finally an adult and soon to be married, I feel like my real life is about to begin. I have decided to document everything that happens to me, for my children and my grandchildren...

As Sarah Lacey reads the scrawled handwriting in her great-aunt's journal on a trip to Portugal, she discovers a life filled with great passion, missed chances and lost loves – memories that echo Sarah's own life. Because Sarah's marriage is crumbling, her love for her husband ebbing away, and she fears the one man she truly loves was lost to her many years ago...

But hidden within the faded pages of the journal is a secret Inês has kept locked away her entire life, and one final message for her beloved niece – a chance for Sarah to change her life, if she is brave enough to take it.

Garden of Stars Details

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Author : Rose Alexander

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From Reader Review Garden of Stars for online ebook

Kath Middleton says

Sarah is commissioned to write an article about cork, allowing her to travel to Portugal, a place which holds memories for her. It's also the place her great aunt Ines was born and lived her early life. Ines gives Sarah her journal to read. It covers her early married life and Sarah finds some echoes there with her own.

This is a lovely story. It spans several generations of a family, both in London and in Portugal, where Sarah took a gap year. It asks us whether we can ever go back. Can we recapture our past? Can we put right errors of judgement many years later? The writing is beautiful and has a great sense of place. Do read it. It's very well done indeed.

Thanks to TBConFB and Netgalley for a review copy.

Maddy Cordell says

This is a beautifully written book about Sarah, a journalist with 2 young children, stuck in a boring marriage.. When the chance comes for her to return to Portugal, home of her younger days and full of excitement and wonderful memories, she takes it. This is the story of her journey, and decisions, interspersed with that of her Great Aunt who went through her own emotional journeys many years earlier, and told by entries in her diary.

Judith Kaufman says

I simply loved this book! The novel goes back and forth between Ines and her niece Sarah. The storyline is fascinating. I love this style of writing.

I heartily recommend this book!

Jill Tool says

I think one of the things that drew me to the book was how pretty the cover was. It gave me this relaxes feel. Although I don't recall reading a book by Rose Alexander didn't shy me away from it. I did give this book a four star review as I enjoyed it very much.

There are several journeys in this book, a marriage from the past and the other in the present. The stories are woven together. The two ladies in the book are aunt and niece, both harboring inner secrets of the men they actual love, and the men they marry. Sarah has never gotten over someone she met in Portugal many years ago. As time moves on Sarah does marry, but when her life becomes restless, she's asked if she will go and write a story on Cork. She goes back to Portugal, not sure if she's going there to relive her youth, or is she seeking out the love she left behind there.

Her Aunt Ines has a diary which is given to Sarah, as she reads the diary, of Ines's youth, and life in Portugal, in the diary, there are family secrets, and some of them will shed some light on Sarah.

The author has done a great job of describing Portugal to where one feels like they are there or have been there. The story is well written, filled with strong emotions, and the characters are well woven and developed to where the reader can relate to them. The reader is kept engaged in the stories, which I found easy to follow. There was a section I felt that slowed down the book, but I kept with it and before long I was back on track with the story. For being a debut book, I can see the author will have success for many years to come.

Christina says

Poignant with an engaging setting, this was a beautiful tale of love and loss.

When Sarah heads to Portugal with her aunt Ines' journal in tow, she is unaware of how the past and present will collide...

The dual storyline elements were entwined with finesse, and the pace was surprising for a sweeping tale of this magnitude. The characterisation, too, was strong, with the protagonists relatable and realistic. But it was the setting that really stole the show. Recommended.

*My thanks to the publisher for the free copy via NetGalley.

Julie Smith says

I enjoyed this book. It's about life in Portugal in the 1930's; written by the main character's great aunt, the choices she made and the regrets she has. It helps Sarah to understand her aunt more and makes Sarah's choices clearer.

Donna Irwin says

This was a wonderful surprise and certainly not just another piece of romantic fiction. The book tells the parallel stories of Sarah and her great aunt, Ines, and of love, loss and hope. The stories of the two characters are intertwined, using a present day narrative for Sarah and journals to tell the 1930's story of Ines, which Sarah reads as she goes through her own struggles. Regrets, betrayals, love and tragedy all feature and despite what happens both women remain sympathetic characters throughout - the power of the authors writing draws us into the heart of their lives and the decisions they face. And there are surprises right until the end. The most special feature of this book though for me were the descriptions, I was in Portugal and could feel the heat and the atmosphere. Having also experienced the difficulties of swimming in Portugal and the strong currents, I was in the water with Ines! The descriptive narrative of Portugal, London and the characters was just so good. Thanks to TBC, Net Galley and the publisher for a review copy.

Frances Pearson says

I loved reading this novel because of the evocative descriptions of Portugal. Along with this, there are characters you really care about and a great storyline which carries you along with them. I really felt for Sarah and wanted everything to work out for her.

Michelle Baldwin says

This was a really lovely book to read Its so true and how being a wife mum niece isn't always easy then to have a chance encounter flip your world up side down Our lives are very complicated and emotions can play a big part in our choices we make I loved it from start to finish pleasant read xx

Gail Atkins says

Thank you TBConFB and Netgalley for this copy for an honest review.

What a beautifully written book..The description of Portugal over the decades was amazing but for me, the love seeped through the pages.

The loves, secrets and regrets stayed hidden for many years but lives carry on.

I loved reading of the love and respect the main two characters had for each other. It was so deep it reduced me to tears at times; I think because it was a believable story.

Abbie says

I know you're not supposed to judge a book by it's cover but I have to admit I was initially draw to Garden Of Stars because of the cover...it is simply beautiful. The contents of the book are equally gorgeous in this tale of love, loss, regret and family secrets.

This moving and beautifully told story centres on Sarah and her great aunt Ines and is told over two time lines. Sarah has reached a point in her life in which her marriage has become staid and she is yearning for her lost love, Scott. Rose has given Sarah's character depth and conveys her emotions wonderfully allowing the reader to empathise with her situation;

‘But still a hot flush swept over her, combined with a jolt of realisation that she wasn’t sure who she was anymore, or who she wanted to be.’

When the opportunity arises for her to return to her old home of Portugal she jumps at the chance and re-kindles contact with Scott. This chain of events leads her to re-evaluate her life. The dissatisfaction with her current life comes through and although her behaviour is unfair to her husband, Hugo, the range of emotions she goes through about her behaviour and the way Rose expresses them evokes understanding from the reader.

Ines is coming towards the end of her life and gives Sarah the journals she wrote as a young woman. The journal contains family secrets Sarah was unaware of and gives her a greater insight into her aunt and also her own life;

‘We always assume that those so much older than us have not experienced what we have, are somehow immune from human frailty, weakness, doubt and temptation, she thought. But of course this is not the case.’

Ines’s story is incredibly touching and at one point reduced me to tears. The relationship between Sarah and Ines is also beautifully portrayed with the change in their roles through the natural course of their individual life stages coming through.

Set in Portugal as well as Britain, Rose has captured the essence of Portugal wonderfully through her rich descriptions and she transported me there each time I read a part of the story set there. The two timelines meld perfectly together, seamlessly moving the reader between present and past making Garden Of Stars an evocative and poignant read. While I became immersed in the story and the lives of both Sarah and Ines, I did find myself drifting away a little towards the latter half of the book, however, this did not detract from my enjoyment of the book as it quickly picked up pace again .

Garden Of Stars is a well written and constructed debut and I look forward to future books from Rose. A stirring novel that induces strong emotions in the reader, this is a wonderfully written book about how the grass is not always greener on the other side and that life is too short for regrets.

Thank you to Rose Alexander, Carina and Netgalley for the copy in exchange for my review.

Rebecca says

Originally reviewed on Becca's Books.

Garden of Stars by Rose Alexander was a beautifully poignant, richly-told story of love and loss. As soon as I began reading this one, I became lost to Alexander's vivid descriptions, which opened up the setting of Portugal to me in the most inviting of ways. Highly-emotive, tender and completely heart-warming, when I finished this book, I felt as if I'd lived a lifetime right beside the characters.

In Rose Alexander's Garden of Stars, readers are introduced to Sarah Lacey. As the story begins, Sarah is offered a commission in which she is to travel to Portugal, in order to capture a 5,000 word story surrounding cork, and its journey from tree to bottle. Seeking advice from her Great Aunt Ines who grew up and lived in the area, Sarah is surprised when she is handed an old journal, detailing Ines's early life in Portugal. Unsure as to why she's been given the journal, Sarah takes it with her as she heads back to the place she left so long ago, curious about what lies within. Little does she know, the past is about to rear its head in the most surprising of ways.

Rose Alexander's descriptions were the first thing that struck me while reading this story. They were gorgeously real and vivid, in a way that had me feeling as if I were right there in Portugal with Sarah. From

the heat and the blinding sun to the bleached buildings and the ocean. It was atmospheric and incredibly easy for me to lose myself in, and the history behind the cork itself was fascinating to learn of. I loved hearing of the place Ines grew up in through the use of her journal, and found myself conjuring up images in my mind, with the help of Alexander's details, of these stunning places. There was so much depth to this tale, and I felt the pages were full of culture not to be missed. It was a real joy to read, to soak it all up and imagine myself in Sarah's shoes. Ines's too!

Things really took an interesting turn when Ines's journal began to be read by Sarah. It was such a glorious step back in time, and learning of Ines's early life in Portugal had a certain dreamy quality to it that rubbed off on me completely. Readers learn of Ines's life after marriage and how things begin to change after time. It was bitter-sweet at times, but struck at my heart in the most moving of ways, leaving me close to tears numerous times. As Sarah continued to dip into Ines's journey throughout the progression of the novel, the similarities between the two women began to become clear to me, and I felt my excitement rising as I wondered just how Sarah would take this information and use it in her own life in the present day. This aspect of the novel was absolutely magical and I loved it. The use of Ines's journal felt tender and poignant, and only intensified as more secrets were revealed to Sarah. The bond between the two women didn't fail to capture my attention either. It was beautiful, and Rose focused fantastically on this.

Garden of Stars by Rose Alexander warmed me inside out. The setting of Portugal has never felt so alive to me until now, and the richness of Alexander's writing truly brought the place to life. The characters were wholesome and likeable, and centred around Ines's journal, swinging between the past and the present, I felt incredibly close to this story and the emotions wrapped within it.

Becca's Books is awarding Garden of Stars by Rose Alexander with four of my bookish cupcakes. I really can't wait to see what's coming next from this author. I, for one, will be keeping a keen eye out for more news on Rose Alexander's next release.

Cal says

Thanks to TBC, NetGalley and the publisher who gave me an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review.

'Garden of Stars' is set in Portugal and is a beautifully written story of love and loss. It takes you on a journey to remember, seamlessly intertwining both the past and the present to make a moving tale that will stay with you long after the final page has been turned.

An enjoyable 4 stars. Recommended.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I have to admit that the cover for Garden of Stars by Rose Alexander was probably a large reason for me to accept and read this book. That and my weakness for dual storylines. I just love books with two different timelines.

Garden of Stars is about two women, not related through blood, but they share a deep bond through love.

Sarah Lacey is at a crossroad in life, she has for the last twenty years never gotten over the man she met in Portugal when she was young. Now, she is for the first time going back to Portugal and there he will be. But what about her marriage? She doesn't even know if she loves her husband anymore, but they have built a life together and have two daughters. Sarah's great-aunt Inês gives Sarah her diary and through it, she learns more about Inês, but she also learns that Inês has kept a secret for decades...

Sarah and Inês life stories may be quite different, but they both faced difficult decisions in life and I loved how some things felt parallel, how they both have to make sacrifices and that sometimes you have to stop looking backward and look forward instead. *Garden of Stars* is a book that stayed with me after I turned the last page. I felt enriched after finishing the book. Like Inês last advice in the book not only was for Sarah, but for me as a reader as well.

I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!

K.A. Hitchins says

Garden of Stars by Rose Alexander was rather a guilty pleasure to read. I'm not usually a fan of romantic fiction, but was pleasantly surprised to find this wasn't the usual 'boy-meets-girl' froth, but a story that spans the decades and the offers insights into a whole range of human emotions and the different types of love that can be experienced over a lifetime. The heroine, Sarah, is not some vacuous cardboard cut-out, but a real woman juggling children, husband, career, an elderly relative and emotional baggage from the past. The subplot involves her great aunt, Ines, whose own story of love and heart break is told through diary entries and letters. The two stories intertwine and shed light upon each other and upon the relationship between the two women. Sarah's behaviour is not always admirable, but is understandable and portrayed in a sympathetic way as she battles with herself to decide the way forward for herself and her family. I particularly appreciated the strong sense of place and the descriptions of the scenes set in Portugal and London. This is commercial rather than literary fiction, and is an enjoyable and relaxing read.
