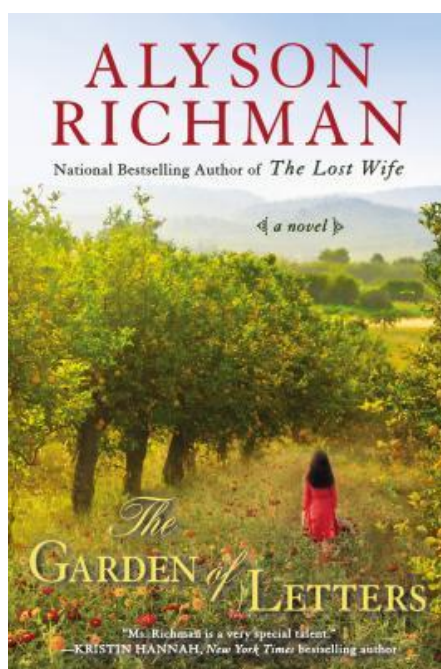




The Garden of Letters

Alyson Richman

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THE NEW NOVEL FROM THE AUTHOR OF *THE LOST WIFE*

Set against the rich backdrop of World War II Italy, *Garden of Letters* captures the hope, suspense, and romance of an uncertain era, in an epic intertwining story of first love, great tragedy, and spectacular bravery.

Portofino, Italy, 1943. A young woman steps off a boat in a scenic coastal village. Although she knows how to disappear in a crowd, Elodie is too terrified to slip by the German officers while carrying her poorly forged identity papers. She is frozen until a man she's never met before claims to know her. In desperate need of shelter, Elodie follows him back to his home on the cliffs of Portofino.

Only months before, Elodie Bertolotti was a cello prodigy in Verona, unconcerned with world events. But when Mussolini's Fascist regime strikes her family, Elodie is drawn into the burgeoning resistance movement by Luca, a young and impassioned bookseller. As the occupation looms, she discovers that her unique musical talents, and her courage, have the power to save lives.

In Portofino, young doctor Angelo Rosselli gives the frightened and exhausted girl sanctuary. He is a man with painful secrets of his own, haunted by guilt and remorse. But Elodie's arrival has the power to awaken a sense of hope and joy that Angelo thought was lost to him forever.

The Garden of Letters Details

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From Reader Review The Garden of Letters for online ebook

Sue Seligman says

This is an amazing and riveting novel about the Holocaust, specifically about the Italian Resistance and the effects of the Fascist government spanning the 1930s and 1940s. Elodie is a 19 year old cellist whose entire life has been centered around her music. Her father is a professor at the music conservatory which she attends, her mother is a woman who appears to delight in and live through the exceptional talents of her husband and daughter. Besides her exceptional talent on the cello, Elodie is also gifted with a strong, photographic memory, a trait that her mother feels is inherited from her, as a product of Venice. This small loving family is surrounded by the ravages of war in the 1940s, and yet they seem insulated until one awful night when Elodie's father has the nerve to play some classical music in order to drown out the sounds of the Fascists. He is arrested and beaten, and at this point seems to lose the will to live. Elodie, meanwhile, becomes involved with the Italian Resistance through another music student, Lena, and she meets Luca, with whom she falls madly in love.

At the same time that the reader is learning about Elodie and her family, the character of Angelo, a doctor in Portofino is also introduced. He also has a tragic backstory. He meets and marries a beautiful young girl named Dalia, but is separated early on when he is sent to Ethiopia during Italy's occupation there in the 1930s. Before he leaves, he learns that Dalia is pregnant, and he promises to send her letters daily. While he is gone, Dalia papers their bedroom walls with all of his letters as a protective "garden of letters", remembering the fragile love that can erupt so easily.

The progress of this novel is told in 3rd person, but goes back and forth in time. Each chapter heading depicts when and where the events are occurring so it is not difficult to keep track of what is going on. Angelo and Elodie meet at the beginning of the book, and then it backtracks to describe the horrific events which bring these two intense and wonderful protagonists together. The descriptions are vivid, and realistic, and the characters are empathetic. The author is adept at depicting the horrible and tragic events of the war in such detail that the reader feels as if she is right there in the middle of the turmoil.

I really loved that Alyson Richman included an author's note regarding her research into the Italian Resistance. I learned that some of the characters were actually historic figures, some of whom did survive the war, and others who didn't. This part was an added bonus. I am a huge fan of Holocaust literature, have been since I was young, but more so because my mother in law was a survivor. This is an amazing book, and one that I will now recommend to my friends.

J. Schlenker says

I've read three of Alyson Richman's books now, and I think I can say she is my favorite fiction writer. I love her descriptions in this book, and she weaves the story into a beautifully finished product.

Sofia Galvez says

I got this book free from Netgalley for a honest review.

This is the second book by Alyson Richman that I have read and I can honestly say I enjoy her writing. This was between 4 and 5 stars for me but I feel I learned so much from it that I gotta stick with 5 stars. Before reading this book I had no idea about the Italian resistance during WWII. I feel that Ms. Richman does a fabulous job weaving history in her books without it feeling forced. "The Garden of Letters" is a story about

love and hope during one of the worst times in history.

I would highly recommend this book.

Erin says

As you fell in love with a boy who loved books, I fell in love with a girl I taught to read.

The book, "The Garden of Letters " moves between several time periods, weaving together Angelo's and Elodie's pasts, as well as their present situation together. This has to be one of the most beautiful books that I've read in 2015. Alyson Richman really takes her readers back to 1943 Italy with her stirring descriptions and sensual romance. Honestly, the writing was flawless poetry that I just wanted to swim in.

Oh and it's official, Richman's character, Angelo Rosselli is now one of my favorite book boyfriends. It all started with this particular line on page 86 (in my book at least)

At what point is a woman most beautiful? When you first see her body? Her heart? Or her soul? It was at that rare moment when you hold the woman you love in your arms and you see all three at once.

Hot damn! Now that is a line in historical fiction that keeps me all dreamy eyed. I really recommend this one, you really won't regret it!

Kristina McMorris says

Alyson Richman's latest novel, The Garden of Letters, is an original, lyrical page turner. Like her previous novel The Lost Wife, this beautiful WWII story will stay with me for years to come.

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

"The Garden of Letters" opens with a quote from one of my very favorite books, The Little Prince." From that point on I thought that I was in for a good story. And I was definitely right about that! This book takes place during World War II in Italy. Elodie is a 19-year-old who gets involved up with the resistance movement. She knows that she's putting her life at risk however she is drawn to continuing to help the resistance based on both her political beliefs and her love for Luca, one of the resistance leaders. When Luca dies, Elodie knows that she needs to find a new place to stay safe. After a couple of run-ins with the Germans, she finally comes to Portofino where she is taken in by a kind man who has lost more than his share from the war already. This was a brilliant, sweeping book and will be a thrill for any of my fellow historical fiction lovers.

The characters in this book were great. I especially loved Elodie. She goes from a cello prodigy to running messages for the Resistance. She is a very interesting character because she stands to lose a lot from her involvement with the Resistance; however, she's brave enough to put that aside and continue to be involved

The historical detail in this book was fantastic. I really like the way the Richman was able to show what was going on in Italy at the time and really make the reader feel like they were there. I thought all of the detail about the Resistance Movement was especially interesting. This book has a lot of information about the ways that the Resistance was able to pass information around in order to hide it from the Germans. I haven't read a lot about the Resistance Movement in Italy, but I thought this was a really good introduction.

This marks the first book that I've ever read by Alyson Richman; however, this will definitely not be the last. I really enjoyed this entire book and was sad when it was over. I would absolutely love a sequel and definitely think that there's room to find out what happened to Angelo and Elodie and the rest of the characters.

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World War II. Italy. Underground resistance. What it takes to survive. I've ready many books featuring the French Resistance during the war but not so much the Italian. These people who are brave, secretive, and answer the dangerous call to help and to survive. We are introduced to Elodie, a musician, a gifted cellist, with photographic memory. What she sees she remembers and her skills as a musician help her to stand out and melt into the background both. Elodie is a school girl who, as the war and the Germans take over her life, is caught up in the resistance and she uses her music to send needed codes. Angelo is a doctor caught up in his new life as a husband, a doctor and now the war. All does not go well for him, he is injured and sent home to his family a broken man.

Angelo's and Elodie's lives intersect where both of their gifts, his for medicine and hers for music are used to save their lives.

A little reluctant when I discovered it was another book of the resistance I came to appreciate what I learned about music and Italy and bravery.

Wanda says

My emotions were strongly engaged in this deeply touching story. The author certainly has a style of her own, writing in a lyrical way, bringing to life this dark period in our history. You'll become entangled in sadness throughout, with the atrocities and horrors of the war. The brutality of the Nazis was unbelievable.

The author cleverly weaves together different time periods in Italy, bringing the character's stories and lives together.

Elodie, a young Italian girl in her early twenties, was destined to become a great cellist. But outside the world is blackening with the encroaching war. It had been more than twenty years that Italians had been living under Fascism, but in the past five, it had become unbearable. Mussolini's insatiability for more power overtook him, and his alliance with Hitler was betraying the men, women, and children of Italy. Italy begins preparing for a German invasion.

The brutality of Fascism becomes even more evident to Elodie when her father is beaten beyond recognition. Elodie and her friend, Lena, become involved with Italy's early Resistance. The partisans in the mountains were relying on them to get their messages to their contacts in the city. Elodie has two necessary things to complete this mission - her fantastic memory, and her musical talent. And the story unfolds, as Elodie, a cello student from Verona, becomes a staffetta for the Resistance when she carries hidden codes for the Resistance within her music.

There was much depth and complexity to the characters. The author certainly brought these people to life in this multi-layered storyline, and captured life in Italy during WWII in vivid detail. The Garden of Letters is an amazing read and definitely a favorite for 2014. 5 stars.

Virginia C says

This book was an easy read. I love this author's writing style.
I recommend this novel.

Shomeret says

The Garden of Letters by Alyson Richman takes place in Italy during WWII. I have not visited Italy in WWII through the pages of a book since reading The Garden of the Finzi-Continis during my teen years. Regrettably, I have not read Alyson Richman since The Mask Carver's Son which I very much admired for the way it showed the differences between the perspective of art as a tradition, and the perspective of art as

an individual accomplishment. In *The Garden of Letters* Richman deals with the perspective of a musician discovering her true priorities in a time of fear and privation.

I was impressed by Elodie's courage when she joins the Resistance, and her ingenuity in inventing a new means of secret communication. I've read a number of novels dealing with the French Resistance. I had expected the Italian Resistance to be similar, but Elodie brought her background into the Resistance which gave fighting the Nazis an unusual twist.

The Garden of Letters shifts perspectives and time periods. I never got confused even though the story didn't unfold in linear order. I didn't think that the head hopping was unclear or excessive. Other readers might have problems with the author's narrative techniques, but I consider this the best historical fiction that I've read so far in 2015.

For my complete review see <http://shomeretmasked.blogspot.com/20...>

Stephanie Steinberg says

This book is about a girl who is an Italian chello player who joins in the resistance movement. The parts about the resistance and the ingenious ways that they passed on secret information were fascinating. The rest was standard chick lit. Lots of silly romantic scenes and descriptions such as "he opened her like a flower" ugh!!! Her previous book, *The Lost Wife*, was much better.

Maureen says

2.5 stars for this one. It was going to be 3 stars but the ending ruined that. I liked the first half of the book but it went downhill quickly. The editing missed one glaring mistake...SPOILER ALERT.....the timing of events was totally off. Elodie and Luca's first kiss occurs in a chapter labeled Sept 1943, yet in October 1943, just weeks later, she is somehow 3 months pregnant? Not only that but she can feel the baby kick already? I've had four kids and there is no way you are feeling a baby kick at three months pregnant! The sudden romance b/w Elodie and Angelo, shortly after she has lost her first love, is just so far-fetched it ruined any appeal this book had for me. I really enjoyed *The Lost Wife* but this book was disappointing unfortunately.

Elisa says

Feeling very generous with these 2 stars!

Megan says

Where to start with this one?

I love fiction set in World War II, and I've read a fair amount of books in that time period. It is always exciting to find a story that is set somewhere that I haven't read about before, and in this case, that would be

Italy during the time of Mussolini and the German invasion.

The premise of the story is good--a young woman, terrified, alone, arrives in a small coastal Italian town and is ushered to safety by a kind doctor. Both have suffered great losses.

So...why three stars?

Well, I liked the story, but I hated--HATED--the switch from present-tense to past-tense. And there were a lot of issues with timing. Did (view spoiler)

While I fully expected Angelo and Elodie to fall in love, I would have liked to see more development of their story together, instead of quite so many flashbacks. For a love story about these two characters, I read far more about Elodie and her parents, Elodie and Luca, and Angelo and Dalia than I did about Angelo and Elodie falling for each other. It felt clumsy and not-well-planned.

Overall, I *enjoyed* the book, but it's not a *great* book. It will make its way to the used bookstore, not to my book shelf.

Dorothy says

Here's the thing. There is some lovely writing in this book, I mean, really lovely, and that is why I'm annoyed at the problems the editors should have sent back to the author for simple revision and this would have been a great book. Some beautiful plot and character construction, yes, brilliant historical facts woven through the story, and I wanted to just love those parts of it and ignore the problems: we were bashed with just a bit too many of the "superpower looks" all-meaning glances, etc., there were things that just didn't add up. For example, throughout the book, we are shown that Elodie has learned to put a façade on her fear, to move invisible through the streets of danger, and yet when she arrives in Portofino, still with her façade in place, she is picked out by the doctor because she is the one wearing the most fear! Which is it?

And a few things were just annoying. SPOILER: Would a trained, seasoned resistance fighter who is hiding and seeking in the woods, surrounded by the enemy, miraculously find all the things needed give his love a bath, including a handy spring of fresh water, and then light a fire to heat that water? Light a fire as a signal to the enemy where they are, really? I also thought it might have been a stretch that the beloved cello would appear just a couple of months from the time of its loss, to the convenient den of the German commander in a village of little action. We have a few problems with when the baby was created and how far along she felt it "kicking," but, most of all, the ending was really unbelievable based on what we have been told the character of the characters was! She tells him her name, he tells her his history, and then immediately they are making love on the sofa and the sister is making wedding plans. It was not believable with the characters as presented.

The final piece that was just plain wrong was when she decided to add her history to the "garden" but instead of using pages from the book that Luca gave her with his inscription, she let Angelo give her his copy to cup up instead. This removed all the power from the action and was disappointing.

Lilisa says

A gifted musician with a photographic memory, Elodie Bertolotti is a young student focused on her cello, practicing her notes and gearing up for her performances. Then World War II reaches the town of Verona

and her father... and her life is changed forever. She becomes a messenger for the Italian Resistance and her unique musical talent is put to use in ways she could never have dreamed. Although the book is set during the war, the war is not front and center like it was in *The Lost Wife*; instead, it's treated more as a backdrop for the Garden of Letters against which the story unfolds. I liked the parallel stories of Elodie and Angelo and the way Richman moved back and forth between Elodie's past and present. While we forgo the intensity of the war, Richman more than makes up with her beautiful and descriptive prose – almost melodious – of the intense influence and effect that music provides and means to the human spirit.

Adela Holda says

Alyson Richman's stunning new novel, *THE GARDEN OF LETTERS*, is a masterpiece in every sense of the word. Full of love, strength, courage and sacrifice, the story allows readers to feel the rawness of each and every human emotion through an appreciation and respect of music, the literary arts and the plight of humanity during a most uncertain time. Richman is able to connect with readers on many different levels and one can't help but find pieces of their own story interwoven in the pages of this book.

The story takes the reader on a journey deep into World War II Italy during the days of the Italian Resistance movement. We follow the life of Elodie, a young cello prodigy, who finds herself drawn into the movement after experiencing a very personal loss. She is able to use her lifeblood, her music, as first an expression of love for her dearest Luca, then sadness and then, finally, vindication. In a separate story line, the reader is introduced to a kind and gentle Angelo, who himself has suffered his own personal loss and is struggling to recover from the once blissful, and ultimately tragic, life he shared with Dalia, the woman of his dreams. Richman is able to weave these story lines together in a seamless and beautiful manner while creating the exquisite imagery which tends to be a hallmark of her writing style. This emotional story about love, loss, purpose and humankind's amazing capacity to heal, will leave you breathless and moved beyond words while touching the very depth of your soul.

Emi Bevacqua says

I remember over-rating Captain Corelli's Mandolin years ago; it was about Italians and music and partisans and the resistance and Mussolini and also it was overly sentimental but *The Garden of Letters* is beyond sentimental, this is overwrought and maudlin.

The story is about serious cello player Elodie, a young girl who finds herself caught up in the perilous world of the resistance movement amid Mussolini's fascism. In escaping she meets someone as damaged by grief and loss as she herself is. The descriptions of Venice, Portofino, and Verona are beautiful and I learned a lot about that period of wartime history; but still not worth all the over the top melodrama. At one point Elodie and Luca are tasked with evading the enemies in order to set up a new camp after their last one is infiltrated, as their heroic compatriots are skirmishing at the front, and as the evil Fascists and Nazis edge ever closer, Elodie and Luca decide to take a romantic bath. They gather kindling, wash out copper pots, rig up a makeshift harness from which to get the heated water to pour, I mean please.

Kim Bullock says

The Lost Wife still resonates so deeply with me that I worried I'd be subconsciously comparing the two novels in my mind. The books have some elements in common, after all. They both take place during WWII. They both contain a tragic love story, but are about far more than love. They both have a protagonist with a passion for a form of art. Lenka, from The Lost Wife, was an artist. Elodie, from The Garden of Letters, was a cellist. Both women possess a level of courage that is awe-inspiring.

The similarities end there, however, and I can honestly say that I never once thought of Josef and Lenka while reading about Elodie and Luca. I thought of very little beyond my need to find out what happened next. I did not tear through the book—reading an Alyson Richman novel too quickly would be a bit like gulping down an expensive bottle of wine in ten minutes. The prose is lush, each scene having been crafted with obvious care. It should be savored, even in those moments that leave a bitter aftertaste.

The Garden of Letters contains the most beautiful and sensual love scene I've ever read, and I read a lot. It's a many-layered painting that is neither graphic nor gratuitous. It also contains an act of brutality that makes me shudder every time I think of it.

I highly recommended this novel.
