



The Garden of Small Beginnings

Abbi Waxman

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The place where friendship grows . . .

One moment Lili is arguing with Dan, her husband, the next he is killed in a terrible car accident right outside their family home.

Three years later and Lili has managed to resume her day-to-day life as a mother of two girls and a successful textbook illustrator. But despite her outward appearance, she feels an aching loss. However, when she is commissioned to illustrate a series of horticultural books, Lili is forced to take gardening class and the wilted roots of her life finally start to blossom. The class provides Lili with a new network of friends - friends with their own heartaches and problems - and, maybe, another chance at love . . .

The Garden of Small Beginnings Details

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Author : Abbi Waxman

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From Reader Review The Garden of Small Beginnings for online ebook

Petra says

I really enjoyed this warm story of a young widow coming to terms with the concept of moving on, living her life and being truly happy again. I felt her pain and fear, her love for her lost husband, her desire to not forget him.

This story is told with warm & loving humor and looks at many issues: letting go, learning to live & be happy, first appearances, trusting oneself, accepting others into one's life and much more.

It's a warm & loving story. I was afraid it would be a romance but it's not; far from it. It's about Life.

Things I learned about gardening:

- the concept of 3 Sisters gardening: great stuff!....except that I don't like squash. But when I find a substitute I will attempt this. A great way to garden and (I believe) cut back on weeding & staking work.
- melon rinds will coax ants to the areas I want them and away from where I don't want them. I wage war on ants each year. I could use this to my advantage.....and with ants I can use all the advantage I can find....they have the upper hand.
- worm houses: must get one or more

Theresa Alan says

I really enjoyed this hilariously funny book.

When the publishing house 34-year-old Lillian works for wants her to illustrate a book on gardening, they send her to a course on how to garden. Her sister, Rachel, and her two daughters join her. There, they meet a good-looking teacher named Edward and a cast of characters that defy initial stereotypes.

I loved the relationship between Lillian and Rachel. They fight occasionally, but mostly they support each other in a way that's nice to see. The seven-year-old daughter Annabel and the five-year-old Clare are the most adorable characters I've read in fiction in a long time.

Though Lillian lost her husband to a car accident almost four years ago, her sister, her daughter, and the cast of characters from her gardening class help Lillian move forward from the grief. The humor keeps the book from being depressing or maudlin.

Highly recommended. Thanks to NetGalley and Berkley for the opportunity to review this book.

For more of my reviews, please visit: <http://theresaalan.net/blog/>

Elyse says

I thought this book was ghastly awful!!! Honestly... I thought I was going to die if I kept reading

For the little longest time I tried to be 'good'... 'kind'a compassionate reader. After awhile -- I was either rolling my eyes --or laughing uncontrollably, "thinking how does anyone read this book with a straight face? THIS BOOK IS NOT A GOOD FIT FOR ME IN ANY SHAPE OR FORM. I turned into the wicked witch from the east....or is it the north?

WICKED FOR SURE! My inner - mean voice took on a life of its own. I couldn't stop it.

I'm a nasty mean rotten human being... I LAUGHED 'At' this book ... not 'with' it. I'm not proud of myself ...NOT AT ALL... just telling you the truth. The longer I invested time with this 'nonsense'....the more unsettling it was -- that I have such an mean-streak inside me. READERS SEEM TO LOVE IT.
ME: I FELT NOTHING!!!

Lilian's (she prefers to go by Lily), husband died. Lily is young herself with two small daughters. "HELLO.... "welcome to my life". My mom was 34 when my dad died ... I was 4. My sister was 9. Sooooooo, you'd think I'd have EXTRA COMPASSION.....for this story....., right? God - no - I wanted to gag!!!!

Abbi Waxman.... I wanted to read your book because I was sure your were Jewish. I'm Jewish. I honestly wanted to like your book!!!! Please forgive me ... I'm guessing you're a wonderful human being - bright - fun - and real!!! but I couldn't 'feel' real in your book. I didn't find things funny, and I didn't find things sad.

I thought the children were annoying, whiny,caricature. I felt the mother had a one dimensional quality of sarcasm about her just got old...and older!!!

As far as the gardening lessons -- I 'do' gardeningyet I found most of the gardening scenes boring - even belittling at times.

Most the dialogue turned me off. The way Lily talked to her kids felt like nails on a chalk board. NOT authentic. I felt Lily talked to them - about them - around them ... but never authentically with her children. Everything felt fake to me: From cat boobies and male cat's nipples.... so shopping at target... to the dog scratching at the back door....to sister Rachel being the type of match- maker sister she wasand telling Lily what to wear.... to the supporting characters in the gardening class(more stereotypes - cartoonish characters).

This book needed a lot more RICH QUALITY fertilizer --- and less chatter about peas, ice cream, Lily's righteous observations about her mother, her sister, her employer, and her children.
Lily's words of wisdom about who is and isn't narcissistic just made her look pathetic!

THE ONGOING - ONGOING - ONGOING -SARCASM.....tone in this novel was unbearable!!!!

Thank You Netgalley, Berkeley Publishing.....(I'm so sorry. .. I usually 'love' books that you endorse ... so this is unusual), and Abbi Waxman. (hope you can forgive me...I wish you much joy and success: MORE people LOVE your book than don't - I'm the oddball).

1.5 rating

Christy LoveOfBooks says

This book deserves a lot of hype!

On the surface, it seems like it would be depressing. Lilian is a widow with two young daughters. She suffered a major breakdown after her husband died and still struggles with it three years later. And she's just been laid off. Total country song material, right? Wrong. When she's commissioned to illustrate a gardening guide, she also gets roped into taking a gardening class where she learns about new beginnings.

Oh, how I adore this book. Adooooore! It's without a doubt a top read. It's one of those books I love every single thing about it, but have a difficult time conveying it.

I want to put all the characters in my pocket and keep them forever. No joke.

Lilian is such a relatable character who had me laughing throughout the book.

I love the family! I'd happily babysit Lilian's daughters ?. Lili's sister is such a great support & pretty entertaining, too. Even the in-laws touched my heart with a dash of humor.

The class brought together a diverse group who built beautiful friendships. In some cases more than friendship.

There's a tad bit of romance that is done perfectly for the story.

It's definitely a book anyone will enjoy, but those who have kids or deal with kids will get an extra kick out of it.

I love the gardening aspect. There are even little tips at the beginning of each chapter that are smile inducing.

It's truly touching, poignant and very well written. And if you know me, you know I'm all about the humor. This book brings it in spades.

Seriously, *The Garden of Small Beginnings* is a *must* read. It'll cure any reading slump. Read it!

Suzanne Leopold says

Lilian Girvan is thirty-nine and has been widowed for four years with two young girls. She has a strong bond with her unmarried sister Rachel who provided care and support for her children while she was recovering from a breakdown. Her life starts trending in a positive direction and she continues her career as an illustrator.

Lilian struggles with romance while focusing on providing a stable home for her children. She has not been open to dating because of her grief over losing her deceased husband. Lilian gets assigned to illustrate a series of books about gardening vegetables. Knowing little about the topic, she agrees to attend a six week gardening class where she can also bring her children. The garden and her life slowly begin to grow as she forms new relationships while also seeking out new job opportunities.

The setting for this story should be sad but Lilian is very likeable and her thoughts are funny. I really enjoyed the clashing personalities of Lilian and Rachel and their love for each other. These contrasts make for a very entertaining debut novel by Abbi Waxman.

Book giveaway on my blog until 5/15 <https://www.facebook.com/suzyapproved...>

Pouting Always says

Lilian is a single mother of two and an illustrator at Poplar Press. After Dan, her husband, died in a car accident Lilian had a breakdown and eventually had to be hospitalized. Through out her sister Rachel stepped in and helped until Lilian was able to start taking care of herself and her two girls again. Three years later and Lilian is coping much better and trying to learn to go on without Dan when her company signs her up for gardening lessons. The lessons come in conjunction to an assignment for hand illustrating vegetables for a series of vegetable guides. They're being taught by Edward Bloem who is the world expert in humus, not the eating kind disappointingly. The story unfolds over the six weeks of class as Lilian, along with her sister and daughters who are there with her, learns to grow her garden and about the ups and downs of life as she finally learns to open herself up again.

The book is really funny and well written and heartening. I can see why so many people loved it but I think the problem was just that it wasn't really my type of book. There actually isn't anything in the book itself that made me rate it three stars but it's more about my personal taste because I just don't usually like uplifting books, wow that sounds depressing, but I think this is one of the better one's I've read and if I knew anyone who liked these sorts of books I'd totally recommend this one to them. It may just be about the different places that I am versus the narrator so there was a little bit of distance and detachment while I read.

I also kept kind of getting confused wondering if I'd picked up someone's memoir and I kept thinking wow this personal can illustrate and write well damn I can't do anything.

Fran says

Widowhood was thrust upon Lili Girvan in the blink of an eye when husband Dan died in an auto accident. Lili lost her grip on life and was hospitalized for several months. Rachel, her younger sister, was able to step in and has continued to encourage and help Lili with the challenges of raising Annabel, age seven and Claire, age five. Lili still feels lost and misses everything about Dan including his wet towels left on the bed. Her life, however, has become routine and predictable.

Poplar Press, Lili's employer has called upon Lili, a gifted illustrator, for an extensive job. The Bloem Company will be releasing a book on vegetables and flowers and wants the illustrations created by hand using mediums such as watercolor, charcoal and pen-and-ink. The illustrations need to be artistic with a back-to-basics style. There is a catch. She must attend a six week gardening class. Accompanied by sister Rachel and kids Annabel and Claire, she is off to the Los Angeles Botanical Garden to attend Vegetable Gardening 101 run by Professor of Gardening, Edward Bloem. The class will plant a potager garden in which flowers, vegetables and herbs are grown together. More than the garden will grow and flourish.

One cannot downplay Lili's ruminations and feelings of life without Dan. The book, however, was not maudlin. It was a laugh a minute! So many belly laughs! Claire paints her face with red marker. She pretends to be a ladybug thinking this will help her plant and grow strawberries. How about a touch of dog optimism. A half-eaten chicken nugget is out of the dog's reach. The dog indicates that by law (Dog v. Child, 19__) he, the canine, owns the nugget.

"The Garden of Small Beginnings" by Abbi Waxman uses gardening to awaken one's senses to the cycle of life. Turning over the earth, planting seeds, and sitting in the warmth of the sun can create renewal and hope. An excellent tome from an upcoming author. I can't wait to read Abbi Waxman's next literary venture.

Thank you Berkley Books and BookBrowse for the opportunity to read and review "The Garden of Small Beginnings".

Mlpmom (Book Reviewer) says

It isn't often anymore that I connect so well with the characters of a story that they truly not only seem like friends and family, but that I'm so sad when it is over because it means that I will never see them again. It is also rare that I stay up late into the night reading because I love the story and characters so much and yet, Abbi Waxman managed to do both of those things for me with her debut novel *The Garden of Small Beginnings*.

I was asked to read this and turned it down because it sounded sad and a bit depressing but after seeing so many great reviews for it I reconsidered and I'm so glad that I did! There are sadder moments in this story, it is about grief after all, but there are so many happy and funny moments that they outshine anything else and truly made this whole story so worth it to take a chance on.

I connected with this story, right from the beginning on a level that I honestly, wasn't expecting. I teared up, I laughed, I cried, I smiled but most of all through it all, I was rooting for every single character I met (expect maybe *Dirto*).

This wasn't a story about one woman but instead a story about many people. Diverse people that come together in a tiny space of time and truly become so much more to each other. In fact, they become so much more than friends but instead, a family. A very diverse, crazy family and it couldn't have been more beautiful.

Waxman created something beautiful in this story, so much more than how to move on or about grief. It's about being strong when you have to but realizing you don't always have to be strong. About coping and growing and becoming something so much more than you were before. Truly one of the best stories I've read in a really long time.

Kathryn says

4.5 stars.

Witty and insightful. Wonderful group of characters. Two sisters, well two sets of sisters who made me laugh and at times sad. A group of people who come together around a gardening project and form a what I think will be lasting friendships. Tons of good hints about gardening.

Louise Miller says

Abbi Waxman has done the impossible--she has written book about grief that is tender and true, deeply

human, and laugh-out-loud funny. I absolutely loved this book, and I am going to miss the characters deeply. I can't wait for this to be on the book store shelves (it comes out May 17) so I can push it on everyone I know who has experienced love and loss--that is to say everyone I know.

Julie says

The Garden of Small Beginnings by Abbi Waxman is a 2017 Berkley publication.

I admit I started reading this book with a certain mindset. I was thinking contemporary fiction, maybe some romance, maybe not, with 'mature' adult characters, and I was right about that much, but whatever else I might have been thinking, was totally blown out of the water after reading the first chapter.

The story deals with some heavy topics, but it was absolutely hysterical. I laughed all the way through it, but it was also a moving and bittersweet journey.

Lilian Girvan is going through the motions of living. She has a good job as a textbook illustrator, but it's not all that challenging or fulfilling. She's the mother to two little girls, sister of Rachel, a free spirited woman who would do anything for her, ... and a widow.

When Lilian's husband, Dan, is killed in a car accident, Lilian nearly died from a broken heart. She spent a little in -patient time in a mental hospital, and might have entertained a few suicidal thoughts, but now, she's able to simply exist again, not actually living life to its full potential, but getting through one day to the next, nursing her grief, unable or unwilling to let go of it. But, the thing is, Dan has been gone for three years, and those who love Lilian would really like to see her start moving forward with her life instead of walking in place.

As fate would have it, Lilian's boss signs her up for a gardening class to appease a new client, and out of this random and seemingly benign event, Lilian finds her entire world opening up to new possibilities, as she forges an unexpected relationship with other members of the class, not only learning to cultivate vegetables, but also new friendships, stronger familial ties, and maybe even the strength and desire to begin dating again.

This novel explores various themes, such as the relationship between sisters, first impressions, unexpected experiences that can steer us in a new direction, and the simple act of enjoying a new hobby, such as gardening, which may initially seem challenging, but turns out to be quite therapeutic and fun.

Humor is a tool some people hide behind when under duress, or as a coping mechanism. Both Lilian and Rachel were able to lean on this ability to get them through some tough times, but it also helped them communicate with each other without one taking offense and kept the tone light, despite the palpable pain Lilian was suffering.

It was a fascinating dance between the sisters who stayed close despite their differences. Their relationship appears to parallel the relationship between Lilian's own daughters in a way, with one being very sensitive and the other showing an unflappable approach to life.

The students taking the gardening class, and the teacher, all have a role, and each one shares their unique background, which adds depth and character to the story, fleshing it out, and bringing much needed variety and color to Lilian's life.

For those looking for romance, this book does have a few promises and hints of budding relationships, but this really isn't a romance novel, in my opinion.

It is more about Lilian's long journey out of the dark grip of grief, her healing and eventual personal growth. Lilian learns to face her fears so that she can be a better parent, sister, and friend. She must first learn to care for herself, so that she can fully take charge of her life again.

The author did an amazing job of capturing Lilian's melancholy and vulnerabilities, while also accentuating her humor and wit. She was a delightful character, and I instantly warmed up to her, and knew I was going to enjoy getting to know her. When Lilian is finally able to think of others, to draw her attention away from her inner struggles, she is able to reenter life and truly become productive again.

Lilian steps out of her perpetual gloom, into the light, kicking and screaming, fighting it every step of the way, but once she finally steps into the sun, the welcoming brightness sent rays of hope to warm her fragile heart and weary soul.

The gardening tips at the beginning of each chapter was a nice touch, and as a gardener, I found many of the suggestions useful, as well as charmingly funny.

Overall, this is just the type of all around inspirational feel good story I need sometimes. There is no absolute- 'and they all lived happily ever after'- conclusion, exactly, which, under normal circumstances would really tick me off, but in this case, I didn't mind so much.

I don't think it's too hard to determine how things will probably turn out for Lilian and her sister, as well as for the supporting cast, and since the book ends on such an optimistic note, I'm going to go with my own version of events, which is: ' and they all lived happily ever after.'

Lilian's reluctant pilgrimage sucked me into another life, took my mind off my own troubles, while I cheered her from the sidelines, watching while she blossomed back to life, while touching my own life.

4 stars

Victoria says

An easy, feel good read about overcoming loss, accepting change and the power of community to help us heal. I liked the story, the characters were believable in all their messy glory and I loved the humor and the interspersed gardening tips that were ridiculously clever. Was it a bit predictable? Yes and I may not remember it in six months, but I enjoyed it immensely in the here and now.

Karen White says

I simply adored this book from the first sentence. I honestly can't say I've ever read a book where I laughed hysterically and cried all on the same page. Lovely, insightful writing and an unforgettable story and characters. Highly recommend.

Donna says

I found this book charming. It even had me laughing out loud in some places. I like quick easy reads, that can successfully take a non serious look at serious topics. There are some real issues in this, but I liked the author's approach to them. It wasn't a book about them but about the characters, and I liked that the author focused on that.

I enjoyed the relationships in this and there were many. They were well done and the characters were easy to like.

My only real problem was with the dialogue. It was awkward in places and it felt dated. As I listened to the audio at work, I found myself betting that the author was probably around my age because of her word choices/usage (the parts that felt dated) and I was right. She is 5 years younger than I am and some of her word choices transported me straight back to jr. high and high school. But overall, I enjoyed this one. So 4 stars.

♥Rachel♥ says

After getting a recommendation from Heidi, our long time bloggy friend from Rainy Day Ramblings, I knew I had to pick up **The Garden of Small Beginnings**. I'm so happy I did because it was charming, fun, and full of laugh-out-loud humor!

Lilian lost her husband in a tragic accident four years ago, and hasn't really moved on. Not that she's in a deep depression, this story is far from depressing, but she hasn't really begun living life for herself since. Her world is about her two girls, seven-year-old Annabel and five-year-old Clare. Her younger sister Rachel figures heavily into her life as well. All it takes is a gardening class to shake things up. Thrown together with people Lily wouldn't normally have mixed with, learning about plants, soil, as well as each other. The class instructor Edward Bloem, makes the class come to life, and his enthusiasm for growing things and life in general is contagious.

Even though this story is about a widower coming to grips with her loss and living for herself again, it's lighthearted for the most part, and really positive. Like I said, this book was super funny, and a pretty realistic take on life with small children. I live in northern Los Angeles, and a lot of times the life pictured in movies or books isn't close to my experience, but I think the author captured a more authentic representation of Los Angeles area life.

I received a copy, but I ended up listening to the audio version, and I enjoyed the narration. Emily Rankin had great comedic timing, given that much of the story is humorous observations and situations, that was important. The only voice I wasn't super keen on was Edward's. The accent sounded like an old German professor, instead of a handsome man from Holland. At any rate, it didn't hamper my enjoyment of their romance.

A copy was kindly provided by Berkley via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

This review is also posted at The Readers Den.
