



Castle of Dreams

Elise McCune

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A ruined castle deep in the rainforest holds a secret that unites three generations of women: two sisters who find themselves in love with the same man as the Second World War rages and, decades later, a young woman determined to uncover the secrets in her grandmother's hidden past.

Growing up together in a mysterious castle in northern Queensland, Rose and Vivien Blake are both sisters and close friends. But during the Second World War their relationship becomes strained when they each fall in love with the same dashing but enigmatic American soldier.

Rose's daughter, Linda, has long sensed a secret in her mother's past, but Rose has always resisted Linda's questions, preferring to focus on the present.

Years later Rose's granddaughter, Stella, also becomes fascinated by the shroud of secrecy surrounding her grandmother's life. Intent on unravelling the truth, she visits the now-ruined castle Rose and Vivien grew up in to see if it she can find out more.

Captivating and compelling, *Castle of Dreams* is about love, secrets, lies – and the perils of delving into the past . . .

Castle of Dreams Details

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Author : Elise McCune

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From Reader Review Castle of Dreams for online ebook

Margaret says

I received this book as an advanced reading copy and I have thoroughly enjoyed it. A lot of the story is set in the North Queensland rainforest, I know the castle is real and can picture the settings so clearly. The women in this book are real and alive and totally engaging. I could not wait to see how the story unfolded through three generations of twists and turns. In the end love was all that really mattered and how it affected the next generation. Some of the twists I could see coming but not all of them. It is a really good read.

Sharon says

With an elegant plot and descriptions reminiscent of Kate Moreton, *Castle of Dreams* is a great light read. Having visited Paronella Park I thought the depictions evoked the atmosphere perfectly, although I felt the first person narrator was a little thin, and key characters (like Jack) were only sketches rather than fully rounded characters. An absorbing read.

Brenda says

Spanning the years from 1935 at the Castillo de Suenos in far north Queensland when Vivien and Rose Blake were twelve and ten years old respectively through to 2009 when Rose's granddaughter Stella became interested in the history and shrouded secrets of her Nan's past – *Castle of Dreams* is a deeply emotional debut by Aussie author Elise McCune.

With Stella's eighty three year old Nan living with Stella's parents at Warialda (an Aboriginal word meaning "place of wild honey") - a tropical fruit farm in Babinda, far north Queensland - Stella's visit home for Christmas meant she would be able to spend more time with her Nan than in the past. They were very close and now that Nan was becoming frail, she wanted to discover stories from her past before it was too late. She knew Nan had lived in a castle in the rainforest which was now in ruins – she'd visited as a teen and not been interested in the history then. But she also knew Nan refused to talk about the past – Stella hoped she could find the answers she sought without upsetting her Nan...

Gently travelling back in time to the era of the Second World War; and Brisbane Australia where Vivien moved as a nineteen year old naive young woman – the town was filled with US soldiers and sailors who swept young Australian girls off their feet with their promises of nylons and chocolates. Viv's life was carefree until the day it wasn't – but when she fell in love with Robert, it was against everything she believed in. And when her beloved sister Rose also fell in love with him, the sisters' relationship would never be the same.

The dark secrets of decades; the lies that spanned three generations of women – would Stella discover the truth? Or should it remain buried in the past to save the heartbreak of knowledge?

Castle of Dreams (with its beautiful cover) shows the words "An enthralling novel of love, betrayals, loss and family secrets" on the front; I couldn't agree more. I was totally engrossed in the story. The narration is easy to follow as we move back and forth between the past and the present. The characters are drawn in such a way as to make me feel I knew them; I cared about them and felt the emotions they were feeling. A totally

fascinating and absorbing debut by this author and one I highly recommend.

With thanks to Allen & Unwin for this uncorrected proof copy to read in exchange for my honest review.

C Exley Books (Cassandra) says

****I won this book through Goodreads First Reads.****

Full review at <https://cexleybooks.blogspot.co.nz/20...>

I just want to start by saying I don't like books that are told by multiple characters points of view, But I absolutely loved this book.

Its a story of secrets held by two sisters and their families set in two different timezones.

I enjoyed reading about sisters Vivien and Rose and how they were brought up in a mysterious castle in Northern Queensland during the war and also Stella.

Carolyn says

I absolutely loved Castle of Dreams by Elise McCune.

This is a hauntingly, beautiful and poignant novel set in Castillo de Suenos, a castle of dreams built by a Spaniard in the 1930s in a rainforest in Far North Queensland where birds, bees and the scent of tropical flowers, eucalypts and honeysuckle fill the air.

It's a story of secrets held by two sisters and their families set in two different timezones.

A Castle in a Rainforest and a magical kingdom with beautiful gardens, ruins, a belltower and a church.

It's a story about the lives of two sisters growing up together, falling in love and trying to find their way in life in a time of war and a time of waiting.

It's a time of dressing up for a Ball, wearing silvery dresses, pearls, feathers and diamantes and dancing with the one you love.

This beautiful story captured my heart.

Castle of Dreams by Elise McCune is so beautifully written, filled with vivid and imaginative descriptions.

It was breathtaking and I held onto each word with anticipation.

The novel is beautifully illustrated with a beautiful cover and inside holds a unique story waiting to unfold.

Elise McCune is a truly gifted and talented writer.

I highly recommend this book.

Margi says

This was a beautifully written and very enjoyable story. I loved it!

Wendy Dunn says

Engaging characters and story made this novel such an enjoyable read.

Natalie Murnane says

It was just the perfect book to read as I watched the kids swimming. The style of writing flowed beautifully and I was drawn into their world. I love that it was set here in Australia. The mystery was just perfect and the characters very interesting. I love the past and present being joined so well. A very wonderful book and definitely recommended. Thankyou to Goodreads for the giveaway. I'm looking forward to visiting the castle in the near future.

Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

Beneath the stunning tropical themed cover of this beautiful book, lies a wonderful multi layered and complex historical romance, fused with a contemporary narrative. Castle of Dreams is the story of two sisters, Vivian and Rose and their experiences in Australia during the Second World War era. Tied to this wartime story is that of their granddaughter/great niece Stella, who seeks to uncover a shroud of secrets that surround her grandmother. Set in the tranquil and tropical locale of far north Queensland, in the grounds of a Spanish style castle, this is a remarkable spilt style narrative of the lives, loves and family secrets of the two Blake sisters.

I had an immediate feeling when I bought this book that I was absolutely going to love it. I simply cannot resist novels that combine a contemporary narrative with a historical fiction story thread, particularly if it is set in Australia. Castle of Dreams successfully weaves intrigue, ancestral secrets, love and history perfectly together.

I enjoyed following the journey of each of the characters in this novel, from the two Blake sisters in the wartime - their complications as well as the twists and turns their lives take. McCune has constructed characters that are likeable, relatable and have interesting stories to match.

There are some fantastic themes running through this book that McCune tackles with precision and insight. It was fascinating to learn about the Australia during wartime. It is clear that McCune has drawn from a variety of sources to inform her narrative. McCune sensitively and comprehensively covers such topics as PTSD in returned soldiers, the treatment of American troops in Australia and Australia's involvement in the war in the Pacific region. She also portrays very accurately the societal expectations of the time. The final result is a novel that is finely in tune with the era in which it is depicting.

The setting in Castle of Dreams is simply magical. There is an ethereal quality about the beautiful Castillo de Suenos, which plays as a major centrepiece in the novel. I looked forward to the scenes that featured this lavish locale and found myself keen on researching more about 'Paronella Park', which was the muse for Castillo de Suenos. McCune compliments her descriptions of Castillo de Suenos with prose on the

surrounding flora and fauna, which gives the reader a wonderful distinct picture of life in this part of Australia.

Castle of Dreams is a novel that I simply just could not resist putting down. I read it in two days. The latter part of the novel ensured that I was unable to stop turning the pages until the secrets of the Blake sisters were uncovered. When I reached the conclusion I felt a mixture of sadness and happiness in how the characters end up.

Castle of Dreams is a spellbinding and magical novel that illustrates the power of long held family secrets. Castle of Dreams is easily a five star read for me, it is the type of book that I am going to pass on to as many readers as I can as I adored it.

RitaSkeeter says

[3.5] After a very busy few months, this book was a welcome change of pace. The book is split between WWII Australia and 2003 (a couple of short chapters) and 2009.

I'm not sure if it is just the book I'm picking up, but narratives split between different time periods seem more common than they used to be. It worked well in this book with the book being driven by a genealogical mystery the main character, Stella, becomes aware of and works through. While the mystery itself is easy to guess for us readers at home, what the author did really well was to show how the past can be obscured through pain people have and not wanting to talk about it. It shows Stella needing to talk to many different people to gather little pieces of information that add to her understanding of what happened. It touches a little, not significantly, of the ethics of digging up the past when it is possibly against the wishes of your family member.

Being a (very!) amateur genealogist I enjoyed that aspect of the novel a lot. But what I loved what the picture of war time Australia; the women left at on the home front who had no idea where their loved ones were or whether they may come home; the depiction of the way PTSD "shell shock" affected one man; and the tensions between Australian and American troops, even whilst grateful for the assistance from America.

I enjoyed this book, and my thanks to the publisher and Goodreads giveaways for this cope to read.

Jenn J McLeod says

There is so much to love about this novel: a love story beautifully told, a lush setting that transported me to a glamorous earlier era in Australia's history — and who doesn't love an old castle? In fact, this nomadic novelist is now turning the caravan around and heading to the place that inspired Castle of Dreams. Present-day plots woven with the past (and a few family secrets) are my favourite and this story is also the perfect blend of evocative writing and authenticity. Highly recommended.

Janet Ryan says

I recently finished reading Elise McCune's Castle of dreams novel which I recently won a copy of thanks to Allen and Unwin and Goodreads. It was a captivating novel spanning decades. The picturesque images and characters portrayed by this author (which amazingly is her first published) set in far north Queensland's

rainforest region and begins about the time of the second world War held many secrets, dramas, loves lost and reclaimed and showed the true importance of family. I loved it my favourite book this year. I can't wait to read her next novel. Thanks again for picking me as a winner

Bernadette Nomres says

I have always loved novels which reflect history in some way and it was both refreshing and enlightening to read a novel set in Australia during the Second World War. Not only did the author give us an intriguing love story, she also compassionately handled the very sensitive issue of post traumatic stress disorder which ultimately led to domestic violence, issues which are finally being acknowledged and addressed today. Back in the '50s, however, both topics would have been 'off limits', much like extra marital affairs, which meant that none of the 'victims' would have been able to receive the help they required, but rather relied on friends and family for support; a weight not everyone was strong enough, or willing to share. McCune's characters show both strength and vulnerability and truly reflect the prevailing times, as does the language she used to bring them and their surroundings to life.

The author's meticulous research enabled her to accurately transport the reader between generations, environments and emotions and I am sure she is more than capable of telling any story, of any genre, set in any era and I very much look forward to reading them all.

Cecilia Dart-Thornton says

I absolutely love this book. I was fortunate enough to get a pre-publication glimpse, and was blown away by the beauty of the tale and the careful research that has gone into every scene. I am a huge fan of stories that can transport me away from the 'here and now' into another time and place, and this one does exactly that. It's immersive and charming and I couldn't put it down. Highly recommended!

Natalie-ann de Gruchy says

I adored reading Castle of Dreams by Elise McCune. The pretty cover depicts the story that lies inside; a historical novel partially set during World War 11 in Australia's tropical north Queensland. A beautiful rainforest castle, provides the perfect, almost magical, setting for this delightful narrative to unfold. The reader is introduced to two young sisters, Vivien and Rose who grew up at the castle. The plot then flashes forward to modern day Stella (Rose's granddaughter), a photographer, who senses that her family's history is somewhat mysterious. Stella has many questions about her enigmatic family, but her mother Linda is a "closed archive" and prefers to focus her attention on the present. Against her mother's wishes, Stella finds the intrigue too enticing, and instigates a journey to hunt for the answers she seeks. Stella discovers Rose and Vivien's lives had many captivating twists and turns incorporating romance, shocking secrets, lies, and experiences of horror and heartbreak from living within a world at war. The beautiful and expressive language brings to life the charm and romance of the 1940s era, and demonstrates that the experiences and decisions of our ancestors can influence the family of future generations. Whilst family tree research can provide a context in which to better construct one's sense of identity, the novel touches on the ethical dilemma that it can be either joyful, or distressing to those it impacts. I loved Castle of Dreams so much so, that I will be buying copies as gifts for my mum, and my partner's mum for Mother's Day.

