



## The Flowers of the Field

*Sarah Harrison*

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From London and the fields of Kent to Paris, Vienna and the Western Front, the lives of three very different women are changed irrevocably by love, ambition and the First World War. Dorothea, Dulcie and Primmy. Their dreams and aspirations found a voice above history's most horrifying conflict. Their triumphs and tragedies were shared by a generation. Their unforgettable story unfolds in the epic novel of our time.

## **The Flowers of the Field Details**

Date : Published January 1st 1996 by Little Brown and Company (first published 1980)

ISBN : 9780751518962

Author : Sarah Harrison

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, War, Romance, Historical Romance, Literature, 20th Century, World War I

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## From Reader Review The Flowers of the Field for online ebook

### Kylie Duthie says

How can such a long book have barely anything of note actually happen? And too much description & not enough action.

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### Anna says

On August 4th 1914, the First World War started.

Yesterday, August 4th 2014, Britain and Europe commemorated the 100th anniversary with services held in Westminster Abbey and European war cemeteries, as well as at local churches and war memorials. At the Mons War Cemetery in Belgium, a single white rose was laid on the grave of the first British soldier to die in action, 17 year old John Parr.

During these services, excerpts from the letters and diaries of WW1 soldiers and their families were read out, bringing home the personal realities of war.

Private Michael Lennon wrote to his brother:

*Well Frank, I suppose we are for it tomorrow, if we don't get shelled on the way. I can only hope we have all the luck to come through the night and if I should get bowled out - well it can't be helped.*

Private Lennon was killed a month later.

Many of the services were held by candlelight, and at 11pm, the exact moment that Britain declared war on Germany, these candles were extinguished. Inspired by the words spoken by the then Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, '*the lamps are going out all over Europe*', homes, businesses and national landmarks including Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, Tower Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral took part in an hour-long Lights Out tribute to mark the start of the Great War, switching off all their lights bar one.

We will remember them.

### Edit: August 15th 2014

Loved the book. It touched on everything in WWI, with female characters being ambulance drivers, nurses, VADs, factory workers and suffragettes, and male characters being Majors, Privates, Conchies and POWs. Life at home and in the trenches is vividly depicted, never shying away from the horrors of war or the pain of parting, making for a very moving and powerful read which had me in tears more than once. An easy 5 stars.

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### **Caroline Wilson says**

Originally published in the early 1980s, *The Flowers of the Field* is the first part of Sarah Harrison's Flower Trilogy which begins the series' chronicle of the upper middle-class Tennant family. There is Ralph, the impetuous, hotheaded, but brilliant industrialist, and his wife, the beautiful, aristocratic Venetia. Their children are a range of personalities: Aubrey is the boring and dutiful heir apparent, Thea is the independent but sexually repressed oldest daughter, while Dulcie is the cosseted and flighty youngest. There are a host of other characters in this novel ranging from Ralph's sour widowed sister, Sophia, and her cowed, bookish son, Maurice, to Primmy, the upstairs maid longing for a different world where she is not defined by her profession or social class. Against their stories is the outbreak of World War I, which will try all of them in turns.

Harrison excels at setting. The home front during the war covers all perspectives, even unique ones such as those who chose to conscientiously object to the endless killing. Scenes from the front are gut-wrenching and, at times, almost too violent to read without becoming queasy. But the cast of characters, while providing an opportunity for showcasing various perspectives, hampers the pacing of the novel. At a whopping 752 pages, there seems no end in sight at times, and not all of the characters are interesting or needed. Some are just despicable, including the vacant, almost sociopathic Dulcie, who learns that her chief talent can be found between the sheets. Thea, while the heroine in many ways, can be downright whiny at times. But for those who love a sprawling family saga set against the trials and triumphs of war, *The Flowers of the Field* may be a good place to start.

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### **Elaine says**

This book is one of my guilty pleasures - my paperback copy is getting extremely battered from being reread over the years. It is a really gripping, addictive family saga with WWI as its backdrop, showing the dreadful and heartrending effects it has on just one family. I absolutely adored the characters of sisters Dulcie and in particular Thea - a strong woman ahead of her times, and a character that has stayed with me ever since. The story is very readable with a plot that moves at a really good pace. Even now, I find the war sections of the book extremely vivid and moving when I read them. In addition the book focusses on the suffragettes and the Womens Movement and these parts of the book were really fascinating, especially the changes it brought in how women thought and behaved.

In summary, this is a fantastic book that is very easy to read in spite of some very gory and gruesome war sections. It is what I would call a comfort read - for curling up on the sofa and getting totally and utterly lost in.

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### **Kaelene says**

I definitely felt like I was reading a television drama, which was quite entertaining. There was still a lot of awkward details that I felt could have been left out.

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**Ilaria Fevola says**

I really enjoyed this reading. The story seems like an epic one following the adventures of three women at the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the First World War. In spite of the 800 pages that presents the book as an heavy one, the story is very well written and full of accurate descriptions of the historical facts and environments. The author tried though the three main characters to present the developments of both the upper class and their servants which made me remind of the story line of Downton Abbey. I strongly recommend this reading to all lovers of historical novels with great female characters. 5 stars are duly deserved to this book that is the first chapter of a saga.

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**Rachel says**

I read this book not long after it came out and absolutely loved it.

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**Barry says**

Oh my gosh - that was hard work! Nearly 750 pages in a book where virtually nothing of any interest happens at all. So we've got three women, two sisters from a wealthy family and their maid. Stuff happens, some stuff happens with men, World War I happens, blah blah, blah. I think I deserve a medal for actually finishing this for my book group.

The book is quite annoying really, I swear I was on page 80 before anything remotely of note happened. The book is really overwritten, just as soon as something interesting starts to happen the thread is dropped due to Harrison trying to manage a large cast and give them something to do. The book aims so hard to be 'epic' yet fails because most of it is just so mundane.

I could write the whole plot in this review including every spoiler and it wouldn't spoil anyone's enjoyment of the book. That's because Harrison ABSOLUTELY TELEGRAPHS EVERYTHING that is going to happen, usually giving the reader a few hundred pages notice! I don't think I am a particularly perceptive reader in that sometimes I am truly surprised by things in books which others see coming but really, every single plot twist can be seen way in advance. The teases and clues Harrison gives absolutely spoil what is coming.

Her characters are bland and uninteresting, actually some of the 'concepts' of the characters are interesting yet the writing manages to take an idea to explore and leave the reader uninterested in finding out more. At times the plot is overly sentimental, there are some ridiculous coincidences with characters and some exceptionally poor writing of sex scenes.

Boring.

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### **Sheila says**

I would like to rate this book as 3 1/2. The story follows three women during the years just before WWI and during the war years themselves. Thea, and her youngest sister, Dulcie, are the two daughters of a higher middle class family in England. Primmy is one of the maids in the household but Primmy has higher expectations for herself. Dulcie is headstrong but doesn't always think things through before she acts. An embarrassing event occurs involving Dulcie and both girls are sent to Vienna to live with their aunt and uncle for a period of time. Then WWI begins and Dulcie decides to stay in France. Thea returns home and after a few years decides to join the war effort as an ambulance driver in France. We learn about how life was for these women when they worked in this role. A good family friend has joined the army and we get a glimpse of how difficult it was for those men as well. Primmy leaves her position as a maid and decides to take up nursing. She works hard and wants to pursue a full education as a nurse but her financial situation prevents her from fulfilling that role. We learn a bit about the suffragette move as well as what happened to those individuals who refused to fight for their country.

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### **Debbie Rainer says**

Loved, loved, loved this book. Have saved up the sequel for a treat in 2019!

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### **Hans Brienesse says**

A good if somewhat long read with a plot that is in some ways predictable and in others hard to follow as it snakes this way and that through various circumstances. Even though the events surrounding the characters was obvious it did not detract from the enjoyment of reading it. It does read somewhat like a history of the English Speaking Peoples but does have some very descriptive passages. I enjoyed it, you will enjoy it, and I shall seek out the sequels to this book.

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### **Elisabeth says**

“The Flowers of the Field” is an epic story of the Tennant family and how the onset of World War One changes the lives of not only eldest daughter Thea – a headstrong young women, of sister Dulcie, a flighty young women whose behaviour is not becoming of a women of her status and of maid Primmy realises that the war has given her a way to escape a life in service. However, this is not some sentimental love story. It is a love story but set amongst the horrors of the trenches which is throughout the book is treated with gritty description so much so you often feel yourself being swallowed up by the mud and experiencing gore and terror of Flanders fields first hand.

It is a tale of love, death, heroism and patriotism showing the war through the eyes of a soldier, suffragette and pacifist. Although it is a long book 746 pages, it hardly took me any time to read as the story was so absorbing and gripping, I just wanted to keep picking it up .

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### **Jill says**

It's many years, probably 20 or more, since I read this but it is one of those books that has never completely left my mind, which I think says enough about my rating of it. I can't remember all the specifics of it apart from it being about Thea, Dulcie and their maid whose name escapes me, and the way their lives are changed by WW1. This book and it's sequel 'A Flower That's Free' both created such a lasting impression on me when I borrowed them from the library all those years ago. I really must get hold of them and read them again.

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### **Kevin Kern says**

A horrifically, wonderful book; both those adjectives describe this long, long story. Horrific are the great descriptions of WWI; trenches, mud and more mud, all the while blasting 1 another away. Wonderful are the author's riveting characters.

It took over a month to read this, because I could only read it for about an hour each day. I grabbed a couple lighter books, during that month, too. Well 2 weren't really light, about 9/11, but they were young adult, so quicker to read.

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### **Ruthie Nixon says**

This book is ok, but that's where it ends. Rather mawkish and over descriptive in places, however it does have an interesting enough story to keep the reader interested enough to continue. I did care about the characters, but found them a bit clichéd and obvious. There were also far too many ridiculous coincidences eg jack meeting Josef in the trenches.

The funniest writing in the book is the lovemaking scene between Jack and Thea. I actually laughed out loud several times and had such giggles that I couldn't speak in order to read out the passage about Jack's "strange orchid like growth sprouting from its tuffet of dark hair" to my husband.

I wouldn't read any other books by Sarah Harrison.

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