



The Victory Garden

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From the bestselling author of *The Tuscan Child* comes a beautiful and heart-rending novel of a woman's love and sacrifice during the First World War.

As the Great War continues to take its toll, headstrong twenty-one-year-old Emily Bryce is determined to contribute to the war effort. She is convinced by a cheeky and handsome Australian pilot that she can do more, and it is not long before she falls in love with him and accepts his proposal of marriage.

When he is sent back to the front, Emily volunteers as a "land girl," tending to the neglected grounds of a large Devonshire estate. It's here that Emily discovers the long-forgotten journals of a medicine woman who devoted her life to her herbal garden. The journals inspire Emily, and in the wake of devastating news, they are her saving grace. Emily's lover has not only died a hero but has left her terrified—and with child. Since no one knows that Emily was never married, she adopts the charade of a war widow.

As Emily learns more about the volatile power of healing with herbs, the found journals will bring her to the brink of disaster, but may open a path to her destiny.

The Victory Garden Details

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From Reader Review The Victory Garden for online ebook

Liz says

Rhys Bowen specializes in historical fiction with a heavy side of romance. This time, she turns her attention to the last year of WWI. Emily is a young lady of means, at a loss of purpose when she meets a young Australian flyer recuperating at the hospital next to her home and they quickly fall in love. Once she turns 21, she signs up to be a land girl, much to the consternation of her parents. It doesn't take long for her to end up engaged, pregnant and her fiancé dead.

This book is heavy on romance and drama, light on historical issues. Don't expect to learn anything about England during WWI. In fact, anyone expecting historical fiction, steer clear. I found the story formulaic, but I did enjoy Emily and the other characters. This is a sweet novel and it is enjoyable as long as you aren't looking for anything deep.

This is the third Bowen novel I've read. I enjoyed *In Farleigh Field* but barely tolerated *The Tuscan Child*. I'm coming to the conclusion I'm probably not the intended audience for Bowen.

My thanks to netgalley and Lake Union Publishing for an advance copy of this book.

? Gramy ? says

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It did seem to take an awfully long time (nearly six chapters) to set the scene, develop the plot, and build the characters. But after all the groundwork was constructed, the story flourished into an intricately detailed drama, entertaining the reader by allowing them to visit another time and place with hours of pleasure.

This quote is a very minor influence of the book, but it rings so true"

Books are wonderful. *You can get transported away by a good story. If we're living in a place like this, we can read about Paris or a tropical island and feel like we are there.*

The focus was on the last year of WWI. However, its central point of the attention was shone on the people at home that suffered traumatically from the effects of the war, especially the women. The women learned so much about life and how to survive. The skills they learned and the friends they made provided them with hope, strength, and peace of mind. There were a lot of changes for women during this era and you get a feel for how some of them were introduced.

The main character was brought up in the upper class and chose to volunteer to serve their country in the Women's Land Army, against her parent's wishes. After receiving a harsh rebuke from her parents and hearing their thoughts and beliefs about the situation a neighbor girl had found herself in, she was left with only the ability to react by separating herself from them to save their reputation. She battled with feeling defenseless against hope, trust, and faith.

The tale provided very little in the romance department but made up for it by unfolding hardship, the mystery of the 'wise woman', and successfully overcoming afflictions, instead of submitting to defeat when things were difficult. The villagers learned to trust the outsiders and eventually welcomed them into their fold. I was intrigued about the herbs and their uses, which drew me into the story more compellingly when they were introduced. Some parts were far-fetched, but it is a fiction read, so you can just 'sigh' and move on.

There did not appear to be any grammatical errors that I observed. I was not that impressed with the conclusion, which came abruptly, even though it reflected things in a positive light. It just left some loose ends I had hoped would be tied. However, I was extremely delighted with this being a clean and wholesome read.

Mark Baker says

Emily Bryce is about to turn twenty-one, and she is ready to start doing something to help with the war effort. Her parents have kept her at home with her mom hoping to find someone from the aristocracy to marry her off to, but Emily is determined to find her own path. Then Emily meets Robbie, an Australian pilot recovering from an injury at a hospital in the area. Even though her parents forbid it, she keeps seeing him behind their back. She also soon joins up with the Women's Land Army, helping to keep the farms in England running to provide food for everyone. Will her parents ever accept her choices?

I've been a fan of Rhys's mysteries for years, so I decided to give this book a try. As I suspected going in, this is not a mystery, but more of a coming of age story set in the England of 100 years ago. Unfortunately, I don't think I was the target audience since I had trouble getting into it. There is a lot happening, and that was part of the problem. The story takes place over a year, and to get the entire time frame and the all Emily goes through into the story, at times I think we were cheated out of watching Emily deal with everything happening. That resulted in some things we were told about and not shown. On the other hand, Emily is a wonderful main character, and I was definitely rooting for her to succeed. I did tear up a time or two. And I felt we got a clear picture of what life was like in 1918 England for those who didn't fight during the war – something that is often overlooked when we think about the cost of a war.

Read my full review at Carstairs Considers.

Lizzy (Bent Bookworm) says

~*Review first appeared on The Bent Bookworm!*

The Victory Garden is a poignant, sweet book that takes place at the end of WWI in England. Emily is just turning twenty-one as the book starts, and she at last has the legal standing to shake off her overprotective parents and really DO something for the war effort. Having already lost her brother, she feels the need to do something to honor him.

“I want to be useful. I want to do my bit, so that Freddie's death was somehow not in vain.”

In the process of finding how she is going to do her bit, she (naturally) meets a dashing young pilot

(Australian! Gasp!), falls in love, her lover dies a hero, and it turns out she's pregnant.

All this is revealed in the blurb, so I picked it up thinking that it had to be more than just a romance since...well, you know. Hard to have a romance when one party is deceased, however heroically.

The "more" turns out to be the massive amount of growth and experience Emily goes through in less than a year. She becomes a "land girl," – something I was not familiar with at all, and I think many Americans would be there with me. She stands up to her parents, who despite being protective are just as much about their own egos as they are about shielding her from heartbreak. She takes a chance on love, knowing that it will most likely end in heartbreak. In the process, she discovers the power of both independence and female friendships. Britain lost a large majority of their fighting age men in WWI, something I hadn't honestly given much thought. The story really shows just how that loss changed – or at least how it began to change – societal roles for both genders.

The Victory Garden isn't particular heavy on either history or romance. In fact, there could have been less of a romance and the story would have worked just as well. I knew going in that Emily's dashing aviator was going to pass, as so many of them did at that time, so I went in willing myself to not get too invested. The history was interesting but not overwhelming in detail.

As far as the actual garden, there was SOME emphasis on it in the last half of the book, and a little tiny bit of a mystery involving an old journal Emily finds, but it was very...well, I wish had been more about the herbs and the garden. It seems like the title is a bit of a misnomer. ?

Overall, 4/5 stars. I closed the book feeling a little sad, but hopeful for Emily's future with her child.

Many thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for providing a copy in exchange for an honest review!

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The Lit Bitch says

I stopped reading the review pitch once I saw 'WWI' in the description, which was basically the first line in the summary. I have read a lot of stand alone novels by Bowen and have been impressed with her writing and historical research.

Her stand alone books have mostly been set in WWII, but WWI is truly my favorite period in historical fiction, so seeing that this book was set during that time earned this book and instant and enthusiastic, 'yes' from me.

I have consistently enjoyed reading Bowen's books, whether they are one of her historical mysteries or her stand alone novels. She has an incredible gift for writing vastly different content and managing to keep all of her heroines fresh and interesting.

This novel started toward the end of the war rather than the beginning which caught me off guard. So many writers tend to start at the beginning of the war and pace their story in time with the war. While it caught me off guard, it was nice to not relive the entire war beginning to end. This allowed the audience to focus mostly on Emily's story rather than getting carried away in the vastness of the period. I know when I read a WWI

novel I inevitably end up down a rabbit hole researching the war, and with this book picking up with the war already established, help keep me on track with the characters and story.

I was most intrigued by the 'land girls' angle. That was one aspect that I wasn't familiar with and was eager to learn more about. It provided a new historical interest for me and I was eager to continue reading about it. I enjoyed Emily's character and the romantic bits with Robbie, but the story over all lacked the heavy hitting emotional impact that I was expecting in a book with this setting and content.

It was a pleasure to read and I eagerly picked up this book whenever the opportunity arose, but I just didn't feel like it reached above and beyond the average novel of the same period. In some ways I was grateful for that. I wasn't in the mood for an overly heavy, emotional novel, but at the same time I almost expect to be taken on a roller coaster of emotions.

In the end, Bowen's writing and experience writing believable stories with memorable characters and romance mixed in, made me give this book a solid four stars. What can I say, I'm a sucker for the WWI era and all the romantic drama one expects from books in this period!

See my full review [here](#)

Phrynne says

Set in 1918, towards the end of "the war to end all wars" the story tells of the trials and tribulations of 21 year old Emily Bryce. She has been kept close at home by her parents who are still grieving the loss of their son, Emily's brother Freddie. The moment she comes of age Emily leaves her home, becomes engaged to an Australian fighter pilot and joins the Land Army. All very brave moves! Of course things do not turn out the way she hopes, but Emily ends up making life long friends and finding her own path.

This is a very entertaining book featuring a number of engaging characters and a good story. It never reaches any great depths but does give a fair representation of what the people who stayed at home went through during the First War. Set in a rural area, the characters in this book do not endure bombs, but they do live through the deprivations of war and also the huge losses of young men who went away and ever came back. All of them were of course brothers, sons, husbands and sweethearts of the women who were left behind to try and keep the country going as best they could.

An enjoyable read with plenty of historical fact mixed in with the fiction. Recommended if this is your genre.

My thanks to Netgalley for the opportunity to read and review this book.

Mary Ann says

Whew, this is the last of this author I had on my shelves! I know Ms. Bowen is a very popular and prolific writer, beloved of many, and I respect that. I think I've figured out why I'm not a fan myself. It's not the plotting; I've read other books with predictable plots which I nevertheless enjoyed. It's not the characters; they are pleasant enough, and many have potential, especially her older characters. The settings for the

stories I've read are lovely-the English countryside, the southwest country, Tuscany. It's the writing style itself. It's too consistently basic, subject-verb-object, with modifiers tossed in, sentence after sentence, and it made these novels lackluster for me. There is none of the complexity of grammatical structure and nuance of vocabulary that make English a beautiful language. Basic is not the same as simple or spare which can be wonderful and effective when each word, phrase, or image is carefully and deliberately chosen, and some of my favorite authors write in that style, e.g., Colm Tóibín; that's not what I'm talking about. I thought about reading my Latin I text and Julius Caesar or my first French reader, quite correct and absolutely necessary to learn before moving on to the beauty and poetry of Ovid and Virgil or the excitement of Dumas and Verne and the humor of Balzac, to name a few. This is just my personal opinion; full credit to the author for having the discipline to write stories that please so many readers.

Kate Carlisle says

I read *The Victory Garden* last weekend, and it was the perfect book for a long, cozy weekend of reading. We ate leftovers because I didn't want to stop reading long enough to pull together dinner. Rhys Bowen is a masterful writer. She transported me to another time and place--England, toward the end of the Great War and then the time immediately afterward. Emily was a character to cheer for. When she found herself alone, unmarried and pregnant, she had the grit and determination to forge a life for herself.

A lovely read, highly recommended.

Julia says

Thanks to netgalley, I was able to read Rhys Bowen's latest a couple of months before its release. Bowen's last two standalone books took place in World War II. For "*The Victory Garden*," she tells the story of Emily Bryce during the last two years of World War I. Combining history, feminism, romance, and a good story, I was drawn into Emily's story, especially her relationship with the garrulous Robbie. She eventually finds her place in a small town, where most people accept her for who she is.

For Bowen's latest, she focuses almost exclusively on Emily. But Emily finds an old trunk with a diary in the old cottage she's living in, so we get a peek at a story from the late 1850s.

Another masterful tale by Bowen. I loved learning about the Women's Land Army in England, which I hadn't heard of prior to this novel.

Siobhan says

I've read and enjoyed a few Rhys Bowen books, which left me eager to dive into *The Victory Garden*. I was eager for another read that was addictive in the ways of *In Farleigh Field* and *The Tuscan Child*, and happily devoured this one.

Although *The Victory Garden* was an addictive read, one I was able to complete in no time at all due to my addiction, I found I did not enjoy it to the same degree as my other Rhys Bowen books. It was enjoyable, it kept me hooked, but I wasn't quite sucked into it in the way I had hoped.

I think my issue is that I never felt the emotional connection I had expected to. There were plenty of elements throughout this story that could have left me feeling a range of emotions, yet I never felt them. I appreciated the story, but it did not pack the punch I had imagined it would.

It had great characters, an interesting storyline, and the usual addictive Rhys Bowen writing, but it wasn't quite to the level I had hoped. It is certainly worth a read, but I cannot label this one my favourite Rhys Bowen book.

Jen says

What I love most about Rhys Bowen's writing is her ability to sweep you away to another locale. She engages all of the senses and allows the reader to escape to a different time and place. While reading this I was no longer on my couch, in the midst of a Minnesota winter. I was completely wrapped up in this story, the distinct smell of a wood burning fire in my nose and the damp feel of a stone cottage in my bones. This sweeping saga is beautifully written and I adored the characters, the setting, and the lessons learned. This is the tale of Emily, a young lady in the midst of the first war. She yearns for more yet is held back by her overbearing parents in the safety of her parents estate. When she turns 21 she is able to set out on her own and determined to do something to support the war effort, becomes a Land Girl. These strong women take over the work for the men that are gone fighting in the war and work farms to continue to keep the country fed. This is a far cry from her sheltered upbringing but brings out a strength in her she didn't know she had and sets her on a different path in life. Emily begins to forge a new path and struggles without her parents financial assistance, yet never giving up her will to do it on her own. This is a fabulous story and in my opinion, Rhys Bowen's best work yet. For me, The Victory Garden was ???????/5 stars. Thank you @amazonpublishing for this advance reader in exchange for my honest review.

Darlene says

I think I've read this story before. I know I haven't. Though I enjoyed it, I found it trite. Again, don't take this as a dismissal. There are many good qualities here. Young women should read books that speak to women in history. It's good to see how far we've not come while learning what has improved.

While I can't rate this five stars, which means I will always remember it and may read it again, it does come up to maybe a 4.5. It was well written. It kept me interested, I wanted to know what happened next.

I love reading stories like this. Women during the world wars and how they had to do the men's jobs. How stories of witches and unplanned pregnancies could cause gossip but not as often as peacetime.

So, please if you want a good read. Pick this one up. It is free if you have Kindle Unlimited.

Jypsy says

I expected more from The Victory Garden. I heard a lot about this book before I read it. I tried several times, but unfortunately, I couldn't get interested in the story. It didn't hold my interest at all. I skimmed through. Thanks to NetGalley for an arc in exchange for an honest review.

Rachel McMillan says

This is the first non-mystery book by Rhys Bowen I have read. I am a huge fan of her mysteries because I love the accessible style, her capable ability to render a historical setting and world to life and her characters. Such memorable characters.

The Victory Garden proves that Bowen can write with easy elasticity in any genre. While I found the book lacked a certain emotional depth; it was still a worthy snapshot of one woman's experience during a time when women were seen to have much more agency (while the men were at war) and yet little ability to decide their own fate at all. It is in the crux of this double standard we find Emily, a 21 year old who works as a land girl and back breakingly does her bit for the war effort even while mourning the soldier she loved and lost.

It is the female friendships and sphere that rounded out Bowen's usual talent for character and I was impressed by how quickly I fell into their world, their quirks and dialogue.

This is not so much a romance between a woman and a man; rather a woman and possibilities when all seems hopeless and uncertain and the makeshift community she becomes a part of.

With thanks to Netgalley for the early review copy.

Linda says

The simple message of a garden is hope that sprouts from tiny seeds.

Rhys Bowen presents a story in the midst of The Great War. It's May of 1918 in Devonshire and Emily Bryce is about to celebrate her twenty-first birthday. Being the daughter of a judge and living on quite a sizable estate, Emily is removed from the hardships that have worked their way into the lives of most families in England. But that is all about to change.

Emily corresponds with her best friend, Clarissa, who has become a nurse stationed at the front. Emily longs to follow in her friend's footsteps, but she's turned down by the Nurses Voluntary Aid Detachment. Instead, Emily finds herself signing on the dotted line to become a Land Girl. This division of volunteers travels the area working in gardens and on farms after the men have been called up to fight. Tension escalates when Emily tries to tell her parents. They turn her away.

Soon Emily is working on land owned by Lady Charlton with a band of good-natured women. This is the first time that Emily has felt needed in her life. But as Rhys Bowen's story unfolds, the reader will come upon secrets that Emily has been keeping. One will note how women's lives of the time were held to such rigid standards. Gossip lined every sidewalk in small towns and villages. There was a compulsive need to label and to shame. Perhaps human nature doesn't change much after all.

I've read many a book by the talented Rhys Bowen including *The Tuscan Child* and all of the Molly Murphy Series. She has a way of telling a story in which her main characters try to steady the ship during the worst of storms. It's honest, relatable people who are flawed but seek a way of their own. *The Victory Garden* allows us a glimpse into the real sacrifices taken on by so many in generations ago.

I received a copy of *The Victory Garden* through NetGalley for an honest review. My thanks to Rhys Bowen and to Lake Union Publishing for the opportunity.
