



## In Search of the Rose Notes

*Emily Arsenault*

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## **In Search of the Rose Notes** Emily Arsenault

Emily Arsenault's compelling debut, *Broken Teaglass*, was resoundingly praised ("Quirky and inventive...meets all the definitions of a good read."—*Richmond Times-Dispatch*). With her intelligent, complex, and ingeniously crafted sophomore offering, *In Search of the Rose Notes*, Arsenault validates her standing as an exhilarating new voice in contemporary fiction. A moody and engrossing mystery, *In Search of the Rose Notes* follows two best friends from childhood who once unsuccessfully investigated the disappearance of their teenage babysitter, and now, in their twenties, attempt once again to uncover the truth. Readers who love the literary, female focused mysteries of Laura Lippman, Tana French, and Jennifer McMahon will be thrilled to add Emily Arsenault to their must-read lists.

"A very clever wordsmith."

—*New York Times Book Review*

"When Emily Arsenault was growing up, a teacher told the fifth-grader she was very good at writing. Give that teacher an A."

—*Hartford Courant*

## **In Search of the Rose Notes Details**

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Author : Emily Arsenault

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## From Reader Review In Search of the Rose Notes for online ebook

### Kelly says

In a couple of places around the Internet this summer, I saw Emily Arsenault's *In Search of the Rose Notes* mentioned in close proximity to Jennifer McMahon's *Don't Breathe a Word*, which is one of my favorite books of 2011 to date. So, I had a lot of anticipation built up for *Rose Notes*; but after reading it, I have to report that the two books are very different (despite both using the device of parallel timelines) and might not appeal to the same audience. McMahon's book featured a mystery that built to an unbearable tension in both timelines and the frightening ambiguity of never being quite sure whether the supernatural was real. Arsenault's offering falls more into the genre of literary fiction rather than mystery or horror. The mystery is not as important to the story as the blurb might suggest, and there's never much indication that the young Nora and Charlotte might actually be tapping into supernatural power (other than a few intuitive leaps).

There's a mystery here, to be sure; the girls' babysitter, Rose, went missing sixteen years ago. As the novel begins, her body has just been found. Nora returns to her hometown and pokes into the mystery, and in the process sifts back through her childhood memories for any clues that might have been missed or misinterpreted by her 11-year-old self. Turns out there were a lot of people in Waverly who might have wanted to silence Rose. But the mystery is not really the focus here; Arsenault's character study of Nora is. The stakes never really rise and the suspense never really gets cranked up, and in fact the eventual resolution of the mystery seemed anticlimactic to me.

As for the character study of Nora, Arsenault's examination of a lonely adolescent girl is haunting. If you were ever one of those quiet girls who never quite fit in, you'll probably relate to passages like this:

*Lately I noticed how little I listened to people. That's the thing about being the quiet girl. Everyone's talking around you, and eventually, people stop expecting you to participate. So you stop listening, because it has nothing to do with you. It's all other people's noise, other people's business. Sometimes your own quiet starts to drown out everything else. And you get lazy.*

*You always hear about how crazy people 'hear things.' But no one ever talked about 'not hearing things,' which was much closer to my problem. And it worried me sometimes. Now maybe it had kept me from hearing Rose. Maybe Rose had been screaming and I just wasn't listening.*

(I really clicked with this, even though my experience was almost the opposite: as the quiet girl, I found that people would talk about *\*anything\** right in front of me, as if I weren't there. Especially if I had a book with me. I knew *\*all\** the dirt.)

I had more trouble getting my mind around the older Nora. She seemed sort of flat, like she didn't have strong feelings about much of anything--or if she did, they didn't come through the page. I didn't feel like I knew her. I didn't know how she felt about her husband, about her old boyfriend, about her friend Charlotte, about Rose. And maybe that's even the point, that Nora became this flat character as a reaction to the troubles she had as a kid. But it didn't help me like her.

So, unable to sympathize with Nora or to feel a lot of tension regarding the mystery, I found *In Search of the Rose Notes* disappointing. My overall impression might be described as a gray cloudy sky; it never breaks up to let the sunshine in, but it never gathers into a storm either.

I will mention, though, that I was tickled by the use of those “as sold on TV” Time-Life books. There’s just something about those books, cheesy as they were. A fun short story for readers looking for further fiction involving those books: “Meanwhile, Far Across the Caspian Sea” by Daniel Stashower, which can be found in the anthology *Death's Excellent Vacation*. Its connection to the anthology theme is tenuous at best, but it’s a hilarious story.

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## **Karen says**

I'm reading Emily Arsenault's books in order, after the latest one was recommended by Marilyn Stasio in the NYT Book Review. She said then that Arsenault has surprised her with every book, and I'm seeing how this is true. This book is, in fact, very different from her first, which I also liked. If you have little patience with working your way through early books, then you should probably start with her latest, but read her!

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## **Linda says**

Book Review by Linda S. Brown

IN SEARCH OF THE ROSE NOTES by Emily Arsenault

William Morrow

July 2011

This is not really a coming-of-age novel, although the two young characters, Nora and Charlotte, do a lot of growing up when their teenage babysitter, Rose, disappears.

It’s not a ghost story – not really – but it is haunting, as Nora and Charlotte first try to discover what happened to Rose when they were kids; and then again when Nora returns home years later and they, again, try to solve the puzzle of where Rose disappeared to. Rose’s presence is felt everywhere, particularly by the two young girls who admired her, and most especially by Nora.

And this isn’t a typical mystery novel. Initially, no one is sure a crime has really been committed when Rose goes missing.

But it is a darned good read, absorbing and disturbing, with complicated characters left half-shaded, like an unfinished charcoal drawing that draws you in...

In a small town that could be anywhere in the early 1990s, two eleven year old girls are best friends who idolize their sophisticated teenage baby sitter. She is popular at school, has a boyfriend, walks with attitude and talks knowingly of grown-up things. But Rose is also kind to the girls, and even indulges in their fascination with the Time-Life series of books that deals with mysteries of nature and the supernatural.

Charlotte, the owner of the books, is the more intellectual of the two girls; she lives with her parents and older brother, and likes to feel superior to Nora. Nora is the more sensitive, reserved of the two; she’s never known her father, and lives with her mother in a shabby apartment up the road from Charlotte’s house. Nora’s never quite felt like she fits in – anywhere. And she’s not even sure she always likes Charlotte, who

can be bossy and mean. When the parents are at work, Rose comes to babysit, after school and evenings. Rose tends to serve as a buffer for the two girls, occasionally letting Nora know she, too, thinks Charlotte is a bit obnoxious – but friends are friends.

One day, Rose is walking Nora home from Charlotte's house. Nora stays out in her yard because she hates going into the apartment, and she watches Rose walk up the hill and out of sight. For years, she is known as "the last person to see Rose." And it is a heavy burden for her. She feels she should know what happened to Rose – but she doesn't. And despite all the tricks and tips they try to employ from the Time-Life books – using runes and spells and out-of-body attempts – Nora and Charlotte can't solve the mystery of Rose's disappearance. It takes a long time for Nora to believe that Rose is dead. Rose was strong and confident – not frightened of life, like Nora. "I remember Rose reminding me that my not watching a documentary about aliens wouldn't make aliens any less real. Dark was the same way – it would be there whether I chose to face it or not."

Told in alternating flashback and present day, *IN SEARCH OF THE ROSE NOTES*, explores the painful, confusing territory of pre-teen girls trying to understand life, boys, themselves, each other and to get ready for the excitement and chaos of adolescence. The story takes us through a few years' of the girls' lives. When Nora comes back to town as an adult to visit Charlotte, we get glimpses of them as grownups, but they don't seem quite in focus. Perhaps more in focus is the now-grown Toby, the town's star auto-mechanic who, as a boy, was a misfit with a wall-eye and lived in a strange old house with his dad, grandmother and brother.

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## **Chelsea says**

It is hard to review books without giving away what they are about.

What I will say about this book is that the story shows how one person's single action in time can have profound effects, some devastating, on others for generations to come. I know that as adults many of us know this to be true as we live our lives and share with those around us. This story shows that point in a very tender and compelling way in a very strong character-driven story. I highly recommend it.

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## **Ariel says**

Thank you to Harper Collins for providing me with an advanced readers copy of this book.

I am starting my review before finishing this book because I really want to say how much I am not enjoying it. I am on page 178 and I would rather clean my house than read this book. If you knew me, you would know I can't stand to clean and I love to read. If I purchased this I would have tossed it in the trash after stomping on it by now and if I had borrowed it, it would have been returned. I don't like the self absorbed one dimensional characters and the mystery is boring.

I really had high hopes for this book. Here is the blurb from the back cover "Eleven-year-olds Nora and Charlotte were best friends. When their teenage baby sitter, Rose, disappeared under mysterious circumstances, the girls decided to "investigate." But their search-aided by paranormal theories and

techniques gleaned from old Time-Life books- went nowhere". They went nowhere just like the plot of this book!

In the prologue, Nora one of the two main characters, talks about playing with her Spirograph. I loved my Spirograph and hadn't thought about it in years so right off the bat I was feeling a lot of nostalgia. I also loved the commercials for the time life paranormal books that were referenced repeatedly throughout the book. The problem is the mystery is not going anywhere. Each chapter is divided into a scene in the present and then is titled with one of the paranormal books and a scene from the past is described. I am going to power through this because the book was given to me in exchange for a full and honest review and I feel that I at least owe it a full read through but I still have a full 200 pages to go and am not looking forward to it. I will update when I finish.

So I finally finished all of it. Page 300 or so on finally picked up steam as the mystery part of the novel was finally addressed. The rest of the book was okay. I could have done without 200 pages of this novel. The coming of age storyline did not resonate with me at all. I didn't like the girls and couldn't identify with their lives. I have an eleven year old daughter and the actions of Charlotte and Nora did not ring true for me. I especially did not like Charlotte, either as a child or an adult. The final resolution of the mystery of Rose is no great shocker. I did not stay up all night wondering what happened to Rose and could have easily lived a very happy life not knowing. Bottom line: not recommended.

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### **Jennifer says**

Stayed up way too late finishing this one -- I just had to find out what happened to Rose! The book kept me guessing -- just when I thought I had it figured out, things went in an entirely different (and all the more heartbreaking) direction. I loved the way Emily Arsenault incorporated the Time-Life Mysteries of the Unknown series into her book. I thought it provided a wonderful framework for the backstory. Great stuff!

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### **Alex Templeton says**

While not as good (to me at least) as Arsenault's first novel, "The Broken Teaglass" (which, come on, was about a mystery that took place in CARD CATALOGS!!), this novel did have its high points. In it, twenty-something Nora returns to her hometown, where the body of her teenage babysitter, Rose, who had mysteriously disappeared years earlier, has just been found. When they were eleven, Nora and her best friend Charlotte (Rose's babysitting charge) became obsessed with figuring out what had happened to Rose, often guided by the information in Charlotte's collection of books on the paranormal. I found the mystery itself, especially the whodunit part, to be less than exciting. However, the book's main strength, and the one that I felt most poignant in the end, was the way that Arsenault portrayed that weird space you live in when you're a teenager, when friends change and emotions and behavior become inexplicable in ways that you'll only understand when you get older, if even then.

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### **Luanne Ollivier says**

Chicago.

A man is about to get on a routine flight.

Suddenly, he pauses. He doesn't know why - but he's got to walk away.  
An hour later the plane goes down in flames.  
It's dismissed as chance...  
---Time-Life books commercial, circa 1967"

Readers of a certain age are going to remember these books - I did.

Nora and Charlotte are eleven year old best friends in 1990. One summer they come across a 15 volume set of the Time Life books in Charlotte's house. They spend the summer with their 16 year old babysitter Rose reading the books.

"But then Rose disappeared in November of our sixth grade year, making the books even more vital to us - no longer a source of entertainment but an investigative guide. By then we knew better than the neighbors who whispered 'runaway' and the police who let her trail go cold. We knew better than to stop at what people aren't willing to talk about. The commercials had explained that there is much that is unknown but promised that the books would tell us at least "what could be known" And Charlotte and I took them at their word."

The girls utilize various books - Vision and Prophecies, Transformations, Psychic Voyages, Mystic Places and more in their attempts to solve the mystery of Rose. But to no avail.

Until sixteen years later when Rose's body is found - in town. Nora has left town and moved on with her life, but Charlotte lives in her childhood home. When Charlotte calls Nora with the news, Nora decides to return for a visit.

The past and the present are explored in alternating chapters - until they collide....

In Search of the Rose Notes is a mystery - indeed it kept my attention the entire time until I turned the last. Arsenault sprinkles lot of red herrings along the way. I loved the use of the Time Life books to try and solve the disappearance.

But this book was also a fascinating character study. The two girls are poles apart. Charlotte was the 'have' and Nora the 'have not'. Charlotte was the outgoing, outspoken of the two - for me she was annoying beyond belief. Nora was more reticent and shy, but it was her I was drawn to - she's thoughtful and introspective. Returning to Waverly, Nora is forced to confront her past and the demons she has lived with since 'escaping' the town. The past and present format was very effective in reconciling both relationships and the case of Rose.

Emily Arsenault has crafted an intriguing blend of mystery and personal redemption.

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## **Michelle says**

All good things must come to an end sometime, and my streak of excellent books read is no different. In Search of the Rose Notes is the novel that killed my streak, which is unfortunate because I really wanted to like it. Unfortunately, this mediocre whodunit leaves much to be desired. Told through alternating flashbacks and present-day discoveries, the fundamental flaw in the novel is that Ms. Arsenault tries to combine a multitude of genres. Instead of a seamless combination of elements, In Search of the Rose Notes is a jumbled mess.

The entire story would have been better had the reader been more vested in Rose, since the entire story revolves around her disappearance. Any suspense build-up is lost because the reader does not know enough about Rose to care what happened to her in a way that warrants the attempted tension. The two characters into whom the reader gets the most insight, Charlotte and Nora, are fairly generic and simplistic. Charlotte is the queen bee, the one who only uses others for a necessary sidekick; Nora is that sidekick. Even as an adult, Nora could stand to gain a little more spine and finally stand up to Charlotte. Much of the necessary tension in a missing person's mystery is lost because of these poorly-described, superficial characters.

Ms. Arsenault also tries to add a Gothic element to *In Search of the Rose Notes*. Unfortunately, her Gothic elements are circumstantial at best, and the reader is left wondering just what Ms. Arsenault was trying to tell the reader. If anything, the fascination with the Time Life series on the occult and other mystical elements is more humorous than spooky or creepy.

Other more jarring elements of the story involve the title and the era. The title is a huge hint to the mystery, and the bluntness of this is disconcerting. No one wants to the mystery to be quite as obvious as it is. Also, the girls come of age during the 1990s. This is my era; I was the same age they were in the 1990s. Either my memory is faulty or else Ms. Arsenault got some of the details of the era incorrect. The music and fashion mentioned are all wrong. I found myself spending way too much time obsessing about these details and whether they were accurate versus worrying about the mystery itself.

I did not want to dislike *In Search of the Rose Notes*. I was really looking forward to reading it; in fact, I accidentally ended up with two review copies. There were just too many little issues that I found with the novel that ultimately ruined the overarching story for me. The confusing mentions of the occult, Nora's meekness and Charlotte's bossiness, the setting - these all prevented me from becoming immersed in the story. I want to lose myself in a good mystery, not be constantly jarred back into the real world because of various details. Unfortunately, *In Search of the Rose Notes* was one of those novels that did not live up to my expectations or hopes.

Thank you to Megan Traynor from William Morrow and to LibraryThing's Early Reader program for my review copies.

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## **Karen says**

I couldn't shake the feeling of Déjà vu that overtook me partway through this book. At first I was sure that I had already read it and had just forgotten but since it was a new release I knew that wasn't possible. I don't know if that was the intent, to create recognizable characters to lull the reader into a state of comfort? To make them feel that this was "Anytown USA" and could have been them had they lived that era, been that age at that time? Maybe that was just my experience, but that, and the fact that the "Rose Notes" mentioned in the titled aren't even really part of the actual story until more than 1/2 way through the book (and no one was really searching for them that I could ascertain) kind of slightly annoyed me.

I did not really care for any of the characters, they had no depth or personality. The back and forth between past and present wasn't as well-written as I expected and at some points didn't have a good flow. I did not find it to be a "coming of age story" in any way.

Other than those things, this is an OK read for a long car/train/plane etc. ride and I was curious enough to find out what actually did happen to Rose to finish the book.

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## Literary Chanteuse says

4.5 stars

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### Kris says

This isn't a terrible book but it certainly isn't a great one. The characters are not likeable and the author works really, really hard to show us that she's intimately familiar with the late 80s and early 90s. Hey, there's a banana clip! And someone's listening to Madonna on their Walkman! Whoa--did those characters just pop a tape into the VCR? Holy cow, people are wearing ripped jeans, like ON PURPOSE, as they walk through their dark-paneled family room! Almost every flippin paragraph contains some description or reference to make the time period feel authentic. Instead the constant references just get annoying (kind of like the late 80s and 90s, now that I think about it. Maybe I just have issues with this period.)

Also, plot-wise the build up of the various mysteries is much more interesting than any of the resolutions to them. Seriously. You keep reading this book because the mysteries of the missing babysitter, the suicidal narrator, the intense "best friend", and the overlarge prom date/mechanic kid all are somewhat interesting at first. Oh--and don't forget the teen Jehovah's Witness who is paralyzed in a car accident (or was it an accident....). The odds are that at least ONE of these mysteries will turn out to have a good reveal.

But no, they are all flat. All of them. As the book is wrapping up, the characters themselves even seem disappointed, talking about how "it seems like there should have been more to [fill in mysterious issue here]." It's never good when the characters of the book are commenting on how boring the plot points are.

It makes me think the author was also disappointed in how it all turned out, like she had begun with some great ideas but couldn't figure out what to do with them and wasn't bold enough to make any of these people actually do anything that fulfills the promise of all of the ominous foreshadowing hanging over the first 150 pages. Hmm. Maybe if she had spent less time describing each freaking page of the Time-Life paranormal books, and more time developing the main characters, they might have ended up doing something more interesting than wandering around bathrooms, attics, and streets half asleep for the last half of the book. So yes, the book annoyed me, in great part because the beginning led me to expect more from the story than the author was able to deliver.

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### Yvann S says

"When we were kids, she was always saving me from nothing"

When Nora and Charlotte's babysitter goes missing, the two girls turn to psychic interventions to find out what happened to her, but fail. Rose's bones turn up fifteen years later, and Nora feels compelled to return to her hometown and try once more to solve the mystery.

The mystery is skilfully managed, with a few hints along the way, but a full analysis is only possible when the final reveal is made. In a sense, all of the girls' supernatural-themed activities are irrelevant, but the important material at that point is actually the girls' behaviour. The small-town intrigue and schoolyard manipulation is also carefully constructed. The mystery of what actually happened to Rose is very much

secondary to the drama of the interpersonal interactions. Nora seems to be a partly unreliable narrator, and it is only through her interactions with Charlotte and Toby that we find out what went on at school.

Arsenault has picked out an interesting cast - no one is even close to perfect. Nora was a painfully quiet child, a troubled teen, and appears to be a slightly unreliable adult narrator. Charlotte was a spoilt, bratty child, and having lost her journalistic job for misbehaviour, is now a smoking, drinking, dissatisfied English teacher at the very same high school that the girls attended. Toby's a bit slow, but on the whole very likeable and kind. The parents all have their individual issues to keep them separate in the reader's mind.

Every now and again, Arsenault would bring out a pretty phrase or a clever piece of wording:

"Fitting that Charlotte would call while I was doing nothing. When we were kids, she was always saving me from nothing. 'What are you doing? Nothing' "

"I scoffed at this weird notion, this mystical time and place - age eighteen - in which I'd wear a bikini and my mother could not tell me what to do. Atlantis seemed more probable and more reachable"

" 'Never again' was a dull kick in the stomach, but 'forever' was a spinning nausea"

"What was I still doing here, picking at some crusty old high-school scab?"

"What Toby described had to have occurred several days ago for the meat loaf to achieve its rock like quality. It made me want to giggle. You could put this pan in a museum and call it 'Bachelorhood' "

and one of the main criticisms of this novel is that Arsenault clearly knows how to write, but didn't want to include too much 'flowery language' for fear of disturbing the plot. I would have liked to see her including more.

I really enjoyed this book, and while it's not perfect, I would definitely be interested in reading more of this author's writing.

This novel had one of the cutest acknowledgements I've read in a while:

"Thank you for everything, dear Ross - but especially for your patient multiple readings despite my stubborn refusal to add explosions, cowboys, or rescue dogs"

Additional info:

I received this as a PDF from the publisher through NetGalley

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## **Jennifer says**

Here is a simple, dare I say common, plot revolving around the disappearance of a teenage babysitter named Rose. Told from the perspective of Nora, a friend of a girl under Rose's care, the chapters alternate between times prior to the disappearance to immediately after it to about 10 years beyond the event. Despite the back and forth plot jumps, the chapters are headed by dates which keep the reader from becoming confused.

The disappearance is certainly what drives the plot along as the characters we meet, aside from probably

intentionally misleading scenes involving certain fatherly figures, aren't really anything but common. The dialogue isn't nearly as interesting as it might be in any of the "times" portrayed. Credit is given to Arsenault for her inclusion of the paranormal investigations used by Nora and her friend Charlotte as a means of attempting to locate what happened to Rose. The inclusion of black books meshed the plot together nicely and made the characters slightly more interesting. Credit is also given for stringing the reader along in what is assumed to be a murder mystery.

Not the best of its genre I've read ("The Lovely Bones" comes to mind), but it will pass the time.

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## **Richard says**

Okay, like a lot of the other readers here, I wanted to like this one. I just didn't.

Maybe the synopsis on the cover is to blame: it makes the book sound suspenseful, nostalgic, and light. It's really none of those things. Well, nostalgic, maybe: if your idea of nostalgia is a bitter nursing of hurt feelings.

Nora, the distinctly unlikeable narrator, spends more time remembering (fetishising?) childhood slights than focusing on solving the murder mystery at hand. Nora is married, but her husband isn't really a character in the novel. I think she's only married so that we don't think she's a loser, which seems... odd. And problematic, since Nora's almost-not-quite romance with a childhood friend is the most engaging part of the novel.

Charlotte, Nora's former best frenemy, is superior and exasperating as child in the flashbacks and seems like a COMPLETELY different person in the present. The flashbacks themselves are repetitive and do little to advance the plot.

I kept wondering about Emily Arsenault herself - What axe is she grinding? Emily, who hurt you?

And then there's the ending. I'm not into spoilers, so I'll just say that it's extremely anti-climactic....

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