



# The Song of Hartgrove Hall

*Natasha Solomons*

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**A captivating novel that evokes the author's *New York Times* bestseller *The House at Tyneford***

Natasha Solomons's breathtaking new novel has it all: a love triangle, family obligations, and rediscovering joy in the face of grief, all set against the alluring backdrop of an English country estate.

*It's a terrible thing to covet your brother's girl*

New Year's Eve, 1946. Candles flicker, a gramophone scratches out a tune as guests dance and sip champagne—for one night Hartgrove Hall relives better days. Harry Fox-Talbot and his brothers have returned from the war determined to save their once grand home from ruin. But the arrival of beautiful wartime singer Edie Rose tangles the threads of love and duty, and leads to a devastating betrayal.

Fifty years later, now a celebrated composer, Fox reels from the death of his adored wife, Edie. Until his connection with his four-year old grandson - a piano prodigy – propels him back into life, and ultimately to confront his past. An enthralling novel about love and treachery, joy after grief, and a man forced to ask: is it ever too late to seek forgiveness?

## The Song of Hartgrove Hall Details

Date : Published December 29th 2015 by Plume (first published July 1st 2015)

ISBN :

Author : Natasha Solomons

Format : Kindle Edition 400 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Music, European Literature, British Literature

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# From Reader Review The Song of Hartgrove Hall for online ebook

## Veronica ?? says

Harry Fox-Talbot is floundering in grief, unable to cope after the death of his capable and vivacious wife, Edie. His daughter Carol is also finding it hard coping with her active young son, Robin. Desperately needing a break she leaves Robin with Harry for a few hours. Edie would have known what to do? But Edie was no longer there and Harry must learn to connect with a child he has previously had nothing to do with.

1946- The Fox-Talbot boys together with their father, the General, are coming home to Hartgrove Hall. After seven years of neglect during the war their home was now a shell of its former glory. As the three brothers battle conflicting interests and little money they band together to save their beloved Hartgrove Hall from demolition.

The Song Collector is written in two time frames 2000-2007 and 1946-1959. Our narrator is Harry Fox-Talbot, the youngest of the Fox-Talbot boys he was fondly called Little Fox. Harry being much younger than his brothers never thought he quite measured up to them. They were dashing and brave, they went to war whereas he went to school.

*"I'm not quite six foot and not quite handsome. My eyes aren't as blue as my brothers' but I've observed that when I sing girls forget I'm not as tall as they'd thought and not as handsome as they'd hoped."*

Solomons has a captivating way with words, words that go straight to the heart. The prose are like a song in your heart. The engaging descriptions of the scenery and changing seasons made it easy to visualise.

The Song Collector is a story of love, family, lose, grieving and letting go. It's also a story about lifelong friendship, forgiveness and reconciliations. It is not only heartbreaking but also uplifting and humorous, full of emotion.

This is not a story to be devoured in one sitting it's a story to be savoured and digested slowly, like a decadent dessert.

It will make you laugh, make you cry and ponder the effects of music and song on our lives.

With thanks to the publisher via Netgalley for my copy to read and review.

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## P.D.R. Lindsay says

Sometimes, rarely these days, a book takes my breath away in its scope, depth and understanding of the human condition. 'The Song Collector' is one of these novels. There is nothing earth shattering in the plot, but the writer has a way with words and an understanding of the universal human emotions which never change and affect us all so profoundly. This novel deals with grief and love, jealousy and obsession, and does it brilliantly.

The novel starts at with grief, a death, and it is at the end of our MC's life. Then we jump back to the family

returning to the family home after WWII has ended. The novel then jumps forwards and backwards to key moments in the characters' lives. There is a rhythm and pattern to this movement so it is not as disconcerting as I expected it to be.

Characters are vital in any novel. Here, because the plot is simple, the characters must attract the reader, and they do. Our song collector is the youngest son of the Fox-Talbot family, Harry, called Fox, brothers Jack and George have been through the war. Harry has been at school and then Cambridge. It's when Jack comes home with Edie Rose, the sweetheart of the soldiers and singer of those sentimental war songs that the brothers have problems. They all love Edie. Jack wins out and Harry heads for London and music. He has been collecting folk songs for years and now he finds ways to use the melodies in his compositions.

There are many lively characters, a lot of information about the world of music, and tangled emotions. I enjoyed Harry's thoughts as he tried to cope with grief and his daughters' earnest efforts to get him alive again. It takes discovering that his difficult grandson is musically gifted to get him to live.

It's a lovely book about human emotions and very human characters. They stayed with me long after I'd finished reading.

A book for readers who love depth, humanity, and music. A must read for most.

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### **Reindert Van Zwaal says**

I liked this book pretty much. It switches between two time frames, the lives of the young and the old Fox. The part on the past is a nice support of the present as it clarifies Fox's relationship with his wife Edie. The book was touching in various parts, the music described very lively and the surroundings sprang to life just so real. However, there were parts wherein not much happened and the ending was a bit sudden. All in all a nice read, I enjoyed!

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### **Michelle says**

Natasha Solomons has officially entered my short "will read anything she writes" list. As lyrical, gripping, moving, and memorable as *House of Tyneford*, I completely soaked this one up. Including a meaningful modern-day storyline in an otherwise historical work is a tough feat but I love, love, love what Solomons did in this book. So very well crafted.

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### **Rachel says**

This book starts off slow and you'll be tempted to keep putting it down to find something else to do. Then half way through the book, you're wishing that there are more hours in the day so you can just sit and read it straight through. Then when you're finished with it, you're wishing that you hadn't rushed through it. It is a sublimely haunting book.

If you like Kate Morton's books, you will like this one. However, this one is not a gothic mystery though it does focus on a big old home like *Downton Abbey*, with one exception. It's an old home that is losing its

battle with time. It focuses on a brother's love for his brother's wife. It focuses on music. It focuses on a special relationship between a man and his grandson. It is a story of the times.

This is simply one of my favorite books this fall.

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### **Robert Blumenthal says**

This novel was such a pleasant surprise. Full disclosure, I am a musician and composer, so it was very much easier for me to relate to this story (though I am not British or live in a giant, old house). It involves two stories in fact, one starting in 1946 that involves a family of 3 brothers, two of whom compete for the same beautiful Jewish singer Edie Rose. It's established early on who the eventual "winner" was, as the book starts in the year 2000 with the youngest brother Fox mourning the death of his beloved Edie. The second story revolves around Fox's grandson, who is a masterful prodigy, playing at the young age of 5. The first story is one that is compelled by the desire to discover how Fox ends up with the enchanting Edie, and the second story is the development of his relationship with his odd but fascinating grandson. Fox is a musician and composer in his own right and sees the grandson as a means to revive his inner music and to rise from the grief of the death of his dear wife.

There's also an old house in the mix and what is to become of it, as well as Fox's obsession with discovering the old folk songs of his region, which he incorporates and uses as inspiration for his compositions. The piece of the title becomes a representation of an important moment in his life and is played at several points in the novel.

Without the knowledge and/or deep appreciation of classical music, this novel may be a bit tedious for some. I, however, found it enchanting and quite moving.

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### **Jane says**

Harry Fox-Talbot, a noted English composer, was devastated when his beloved wife died. She had been a celebrated singer, music had brought them together, bound them together, and illuminated their lives; but now Fox – he had always been known as Fox – could not listen to music let alone think of playing or composing.

He had no idea what to do with his days; or how he might live the rest of his life.

But he found inspiration.

Inspiration came in the unlikely shape of his grandson, a troublesome four year old who was driving his mother – one of Fox's two daughters - to distraction. One day he did something that made Fox realise that he had the musicality that his daughters – and his other grandchildren – lacked; in time it became clear that he was something of a prodigy.

Fox took steps – quite instinctively – to nurture his grandson's talent; and as he did that his own love of music and life came creeping back. This was so lovely to watch.

Of course it wasn't easy. Fox had to learn to teach a pupil who was not easy to manage; and he soon realised that his pupil needed more that he could offer.

There were resentments because Fox was engaging with his grandson as he never had with his daughters. Natasha Solomons showed wonderful understanding of family dynamics here and throughout the story.

Fox threw a wonderful party for his only grandson's fifth birthday; he didn't understand why his daughters were less than happy, until they told him that he had never taken any interest in birthday parties when they were children, and that he had always been unhappy when any concern of theirs pulled him away from his music.

There was another occasion, later in the book, when he thought they were doing the wrong thing for his grandson, but he accepted that he had to stand back, and maybe pick up the pieces afterwards ....

Meanwhile, it was still a struggle to come to terms with a life without his wife, with the knowledge that he was getting older, and with the fact that there were things in his life – things from the past – that he still had to try to put right.

There was another story set against this one.

The Fox-Talbot family home – Hartgrove Hall – was requisitioned during the war; it was handed back when the war was over. And then a father and his three very different sons – Fox was the youngest – were faced with the daunting prospect of restoring a house and land with means that were limited to say the least.

The house was beautifully evoked and gloriously described; everything in this story is. It is written in prose that is beautiful and lyrical, that is enriched by references to music and nature, and that evokes times and places so very well.

For the young Fox there was another complication: he fell in love with Edie Rose, the lovely sister who he met as his brother's girlfriend, and who would become his brother's wife.

How Fox got both the house and the girl is the mystery that is threaded through this story. But of course there is so much more here than mystery.

Fox was a wonderful narrator and I loved coming to know him as a young and an old man. He drew me into his story, he made me care about him and about what would happen, and I came to understand his hopes and his dreams, his loves and his fears.

I saw his world and the people whose lives touched his so very clearly.

I loved the way that his story spoke so profoundly about family, love, friendship, loss, grief, regret, acceptance .... so many things. There are times when it is heart-breaking, there are times when it is uplifting; and every emotion is pitch perfect.

I loved the tone. It was elegant, it was elegiac, and it suited the story that was unfolding so well.

It's one of those stories that created a world that captivated me and that I really didn't want to leave.

I can pick out some things that didn't quite work. The 'song collector' concept that gives the book its title

isn't integrated as well as it might be. Edie Rose's own story was a little under-written. But in the end those things really didn't matter.

Sometimes a book speaks to you, and this one spoke to me.

I loved it.

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### **Ann says**

Thanks to the publisher for an advance reader's copy.

This really deserves 3.5 stars, but try as I might, I can't seem to round up like I usually do. Natasha Solomons is a talented writer who is able to evoke music and nature beautifully. I loved that she has a strong personal interest in folk song collecting and I couldn't help but hum Ralph Vaughn Williams as I read. The structure of the book makes the plot so compelling, which I don't find always happens with parallel narratives. Everything was in place for me to really love this, but I still don't know that I can say I'm glad I read it. I found it easy to put aside, even though I never wanted to quit it completely. The whole thing felt weirdly hollow and I never felt connected to the characters. This will unfortunately be forgotten in the next week.

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### **RoseMary Achey says**

Typically I really enjoy dual-time novels however this novel did not strike the right chord. I failed to love Edie, one of the main female characters, as so many others in the novel apparently did. This is a love story but told from a man's perspective. Love for his family's estate, love for a girl, and love of music is the real love triangle in this story.

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### **Lorri says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel. The author's word-images exhaled poetic beauty, illuminating all of my senses.

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### **Amanda Zirn says**

As a huge fan of both Natasha Solomon and classical music, I immediately fell in love with The Song of Hartgrove Hall. Natasha's writing transports you to the beautiful English countryside with characters who are so well developed you feel like you've known them for ages. The Song of Hartgrove Hall will have fans of classical music smiling as they read (and hear) the music flowing through the pages and have anyone else falling in love with their newfound classical obsession. A perfect book for book clubs, fans of Downton Abbey, the English countryside, classical music... or more simply put, a magnificently lovely book.

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## **Erika Robuck says**

Rarely does one find such a wholly satisfying arrangement in a novel as author Natasha Solomons presents in *THE SONG OF HARTGROVE HALL*. The Downton Abbey-esque settings, the distinct and memorable characters, and the vivid and touching emotions work in matchless harmony. The following quotes reflect the themes of love, music, and grief, which the reader will experience in full and absorbing array on its pages.

Love:

"I want her to understand that I've written this part for her. I know what her voice can do, how best to release that sound. She's been fastened into those silly patriotic songs like cheap costumes, and at last she's dressed in silk. I see in her face that she knows it too, and as she sings, a pure iridescent sound that reverberates through me, I catch her eye, wide with surprise. Listen to what you can do, I tell her through the music. Listen. You are the nightingale but not the one they think."

Music:

"[He] stood motionless in the middle of the room. He listened with his hands held out before him, fingers spread as though catching notes like snowflakes. The hall glowed with sound. It poured down upon us from the gallery in reds and gold and yellow."

Grief:

"Sometimes for hours or even days I'd function perfectly well. Then, something would trigger it. The knowledge of an anniversary--'Today a year ago was the last time we walked around the garden together'--...Then in the sudden silence, the grief would catch me and bear me off on grey tides. I was helpless until it receded once more and despair dwindled into ordinary unhappiness."

I highly recommend this book.

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## **The Lit Bitch says**

I have a lot of wonderful things to say about Solomons writing. Her prose is breathtaking, beautiful, descriptive, and moving. I felt like I was right there at Hartgove Hall. The descriptions of the house were stunning and elegant, I fell in love with the house much as the brothers did.

I would gladly rave about Solomons writing abilities all day long....she has a wonderful gift for elegant prose that fits within the time period and captures the essence of romance and nostalgia that a book like this needs.....where I struggled the most was with the characters, one in particular.

The love triangle intrigued me quite a bit. It reminded me a little of *The Legends of the Fall* movie....three brothers fall in love with a beautiful woman already engaged to one of the brothers (likely the least deserving). I was eager to see how this situation all came about and ultimately was resolved plus I love *The Legends of the Fall* movie and since this sounded similar I was all about it....however, I had trouble



connecting with Edie. Throughout the novel I kept waiting and waiting for something to distinguish Edie as a woman worthy of this kind of love triangle.....and it just never happened for me.

I failed to see what the big fuss was with her. Fox told the audience all about her and how he loved her so much but I never really felt like the love was mutual or as 'breathtaking' as Fox was making it out to be. I never really connected with Edie and I never felt like she was worthy of the affection all the brothers had for her so that was my biggest issue with the book.

The other thing that was a bit of a struggle was that the book was slow. I was well into the book (55%) before it started picking up. On one hand, I appreciated the time that Solomons spent describing the house and this romantic atmosphere that the story needed but at the same time, it was tedious and it took too long to really get into the story for me which disappointed me. It took me a LONG time to finish this book.....much longer than I expected.

I normally love dual time novels like this, and I thought in this case the dual time worked well at times I felt like the time period switches were ill timed.....for one thing, they were long stretches at a time. I found that by the time we returned to the specified period, I had forgotten a lot of what happened prior to that. So I would have liked to have seen the period switches more frequent.

Over all while I didn't enjoy this book as much as I had hoped, I am not completely turned off to Solomons as a writer. I still want to read her other books such as *The House at Tyneford* because her writing style is truly wonderful and I love books about old English country estates and family dramas so her books are totally my type of books, it just so happens this one fell short for me but just because one book wasn't a knock out for me doesn't mean I am completely put off to others by the same author. Others might really enjoy this book, but for me I was hoping for more.

See my full review [here](#)

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### **Sheryl says**

I eagerly anticipated this book, as I had enjoyed all of the author's previous books. Unfortunately, this book left me completely underwhelmed. I fell asleep several times while reading it, and even debated giving up. I did push through, and while the ending wasn't bad, it was rather anti-climactic.

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### **Marjorie says**

This is a profoundly moving, beautifully written book that captured my heart immediately. I used to read a lot of books about old English mansions and the families living in them with all their secrets. I've gotten away from them as they seemed to become too predictable to me. This one was a pure delight and one day I'd like to read it again just so I can once again return to Hartgrove Hall.

This book soars with music throughout – the music of voices, the music of instruments, the music of bird song, the music of the trees and the very ground of Hartgrove Hill. The passion of the music in this book will take your breath away. The story is a simple one. Harry (Little Fox) desires to compose a symphony when he's called upon by his two brothers, Jack and George, to stay at Hartgrove Hall and help them save the

crumbling family property. He's in love with Jack's girl, Edie, which complicates matters. The book fluctuates between that period of time in their lives and fifty years later when Harry is grieving for his deceased wife. The only thing that helps him through this heartbreaking time is his grandson, Robin, a difficult child of 4 with a very special gift.

The author has crafted a literary work of art and music that will long stay a part of my heart. The characters, their humor and drama were all marvelous. Harry is a song collector and travels throughout the area trying to find old folk songs that he writes down in a book. I loved walking the hills of Dorset, England with him as he searches for songs. "The Song of Hartgrove Hall" is titled "The Song Collector" in England.

I'm trying to think if there is anything negative about the book but I can't think of a thing. To me, it was perfection from the first page to the last. Highly recommended.

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

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