



Little Gold

Allie Rogers

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SHORTLISTED FOR THE 2018 POLARI PRIZE

'Life affirming and triumphant' Mark A. Radcliffe

'Vivid and touching... this book left me haunted long after I put it down' Umi Sinha

The heat is oppressive and storms are brewing in Brighton in the summer of 1982. Little Gold, a boyish girl on the brink of adolescence, is struggling with the reality of her broken family and a home descending into chaos. Her only refuge is the tree at the end of her garden.

Into her fractured life steps elderly neighbour, Peggy Baxter. The connection between the two is instant, but just when it seems that Little Gold has found solace, outsiders appear who seek to take advantage of her frail family in the worst way possible. In an era when so much is hard to speak aloud, can Little Gold share enough of her life to avert disaster? And can Peggy Baxter, a woman running out of time and with her own secrets to bear, recognise the danger before it's too late?

What Reviewers and Readers Say:

'A tender, beautifully paced and deeply moving debut... Little Gold herself is a wonderful centrepiece... and in Peggy Baxter, Rogers has offered up one of the most engaging heroines I have read in a very long time. This is a book about individual struggle that manages to be both life affirming and triumphant.'

Mark A. Radcliffe, author of Gabriel's Angel

'Such a wonderfully moving and atmospheric novel, full of very real and very touching relationships. A brilliant portrayal of the pain and wonder of leaving behind childhood, beautifully evocative of a Brighton summer in the 1980s.'

Catherine Hall, author of Days of Grace

'Reminiscent of Scout Finch, Little Gold is a great addition to literature's endearing child characters. Vivid, touching, sad and frightening, this book exposes the dark underbelly of 1980s Brighton and left me haunted long after I put it down.'

Umi Sinha, author of Belonging

'A gripping and yet tender novel, and the characters of Peggy Baxter and Little Gold are brilliantly handled. I was rooting for Little Gold from the start, and fascinated and moved by Peggy's story. Brighton is so vividly depicted, too. It's a great first novel.'

Bethan Roberts, author of My Policeman

'Opening Allie Rogers' Little Gold I found myself engrossed in a vibrant, moving tale of one family's struggle to get by. This is a book about survival, about the pluck and power of a singular child and the fundamental importance of friendship.'

Alison Smith, author of Name All the Animals

'Little Gold is a step back in time, into a rich world with complex characters on meaningful inner journeys that are quietly intriguing.'

Hannah Hohman, ForeWord Reviews

Little Gold Details

Date : Published May 2nd 2017 by Legend Times Group

ISBN : 9781787199958

Author : Allie Rogers

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Fiction

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From Reader Review Little Gold for online ebook

Cindy says

What a surprising read. I'm always thrilled to find a book that contains a story that I've never read before. I felt connected to every character; they were very well developed. It's a hard story to read yet has moments of intense beauty. I found myself rooting for Little Gold and her siblings from the beginning. There are a number of turns and twists; most are not huge surprises yet somehow that doesn't make the story any less compelling. At one point I thought perhaps the author incorporated too much but it all comes together and makes perfect sense by the end. I definitely recommend this book.

Thanks you to netgalley for providing me an early release.

Joseph says

How far back should fiction take us for it to be labelled "historical"? Allie Rogers' assured début novel "Little Gold" is set in Brighton in the early 1980's. It's a fairly recent past, but it already feels like a foreign country, a place where they do things differently. Pop culture references, news about the Falklands War, Ian Rush on TV - these details convincingly take us back thirty-five years and straight into the atmosphere of this book.

According to the author, the novel is based on her childhood memories of Brighton. But don't run away with the idea that this is some sort of glowing, nostalgic tale. On the contrary, "Little Gold" is a gritty, realist novel which brings us face to face with the social problems of Brighton's local community, those left to clear the debris after the holidaymakers leave. And the protagonists certainly have some personal debris to get rid of...

The main characters of the novel are two strong female figures. There's Margaret "Peggy" Baxter - a 63-year old lesbian, whose long-time partner has left her and moved away. Peggy Baxter is a fiercely independent character but, faced with illness and pain, and prone to uncomfortable recollections, she feels increasingly in need of companionship. Unlikely as it seems at first sight, she also appears to crave a child-figure in her life, somebody she can care for and protect. And then there's one of her neighbours, the girl known as "Little Gold". At the cusp of adolescence, she's awkward and tomboyish and has long been marked as an outsider. To make matters worse, besides having to come to terms with her changing body and emotional upheavals, she must somehow survive the breakup of her parents' marriage. Her father - the breadwinner of the family - has just left home and her mother is not coping, leaving Little Gold and her older siblings Ali and Malcy to their own devices, living on a miserly allowance. Little Gold must also somehow save Malcy and herself from the clutches of a sleazy couple with dubious intentions in their regard. Unsurprisingly, Peggy Baxter and Little Gold team up and their warm friendship is the basis of this book.

As in a Ken Loach movie, the novel proclaims its message in unsubtle terms. The collapse of Little Gold's family is evoked through insistent descriptions of filth, foul smells and constant hunger which are certainly effective but somewhat offputting. Ali has an eating disorder, Malcy and Little Gold are bullied practically on a daily basis. The "bad guys" are almost cartoonish in their nefariousness and Little Gold's father - in a way the catalyst for all this mess - is absent and (implicitly) cowardly.

As if to compensate for this, both Little Gold and Peggy Baxter are lovingly drawn and Baxter, in particular,

is given a detailed and involving backstory. Also, the novel is undeniably gripping and very moving, the dialogue convincing and the setting effectively portrayed.

"Little Gold" will appeal to readers who enjoy LGBTQIA themes; they will certainly find in Rogers an intriguing new voice. But, being an enthralling novel with a big heart, it also deserves a wider readership.

An electronic copy of this novel was provided through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

Peri says

This debut book is a total gem. It is moving and evocative with a wonderful lyrical language that has you caught in its flow from the first page. The characters quickly become real and you feel them living in head and I think they may take up residence in mine for quite a while.

On personal level this book resonated so much because in 1982, I was 15 and lived at Fiveways, shopped in the Co Op there and still used the park in the story. The author described it perfectly. Even without the trip down memory lane the story held my attention, I thought about the characters even when I wasn't reading it and the subject matters covered are done so in a thought provoking way and in a couple of places I was so moved I had to stop reading as I was on my lunch break and didn't want to blub at work.

I can't wait to read more from this author and am recommending this book to all my book loving friends as a must read of 2017.

Chantelle Atkins says

This is the kind of book I am forever searching for. It ticked every single box for me. Beautiful narrative, gorgeous yet simple descriptions of the everyday ordinary lives of its characters, an engrossing storyline that gathered in pace towards the end and left me unable to put the book down, and most important of all, fantastic characters. Real characters. People I truly think of as real! This is the awkward coming of age tale of a young girl nicknamed Little Gold by her family. She is on the cusp of puberty and questioning her own sexuality and identity. This would be enough to deal with, but tragically her family are falling apart around her and she does not know where to turn to for help. Her older sister Alli seems to have issues with food, and her older brother Malcy, is also in danger as he becomes increasingly drawn into the adult parties thrown by his friend Kev's strange and domineering parents. Little Gold feels uneasy about Kev's parents from the start, and this particular storyline was handled with incredible skill. The tension was simmering throughout each chapter, tiny clues dropped here and there and an uneasiness spreading for the reader as the story progressed. Little Gold's father has left them and her mother has taken to drink and bed. In the midst of all this chaos and heartache, Little Gold finds friendship in an unlikely place. One of her elderly neighbours, Peggy Baxter, has been watching from afar and takes Little Gold under her wing. Theirs is a hesitant and beautiful friendship, with wonderful Peggy Baxter becoming the heroine of the story in more ways than one. This is a heartwarming and positive book about love, friendship and growing up. I simply cannot recommend it enough.

Pouting Always says

After her father leaves them to be with another women and her children, Little Gold's family struggles to get

back their footing. Her mother has to get a job but spends a lot of time at home in bed medicated and passed out. Her two siblings Ali and Malcy have their own problems that Little Gold can't help but worry about as well. When the neighbor next door Peggy Baxter befriends Little Gold the two find solace in one another that helps them deal with the things going on in their lives. I enjoyed this one a lot, more so the writing than the plot line itself. The characters were likable and I really felt for all three kids. Reading about people going through puberty makes me feel icked out for some reason because I've been there and like why are you punishing me I already did my time. The uncertainty and change in oneself is captured really well in the book though. Not sure how I feel about the ending though, it's realistic if anything because things in life don't tend to work out perfectly, you just adjust and do the best you can. Anyways the book is pretty good, the plot line isn't as tight as I usually like but the characters are well developed and if you like heart touching books about struggle and finding solace through friendship then you'll most likely enjoy this.

PattyMacDotComma says

3.5★

"She was something other than herself when herself was simply too hard to be."

An oddly uncomfortable read, for many reasons. There are a few threads to the story about Little Gold, a young girl in England who prefers overalls and sitting up high in the tree in the backyard to being girly. She wishes she'd been named Alex or something that could also be a boy's name, and to escape the misery of her life, she either sits literally up in her tree or she shifts mentally to a high spot in a room full of people and removes herself from the conversation.

She's learned how to tune out, and no wonder. Dad's left home and taken up with a new family. Mum's lost her job and drinks to disgusting oblivion like a smelly sloth in her bed. Older sister Ali is finishing high school, trying to work part-time to get a bit of food for the other kids – she's anorexic, it seems, and a wreck. Again, no wonder.

Middle child is Malcom, Malcy, which I found a dreadful nickname because it reads like a soft C, like Malsie, but I assume it's pronounced Mal-key. Anyhow, he's as grubby as any young teen boy, plays football, fills his room with filthy clothes, etc.

Everything is filthy, and they're run out of soap. All of Little Gold's clothes stink.

"Little Gold's eyes flick around the room. The dirty pans have overwhelmed the hob and are stacked on the floor next to the back door. The floor itself is tacky with every step and littered with screwed-up tissues, the papery peel of onions and a dense scurf of crumbs around the edge. The doors of the lower cupboards are streaked with long drips of dark liquid, the weeping of tea bags on their way from mug to bin. And it stinks wildly today."

To escape an ominous pronouncement to the family from her mother, LG (as she is often called) has "flown" upwards to a high perch until her mother leaves the room.

“Little Gold, still a bird, blinking from the top of the kitchen cupboard, watches her go. Then she plummets, folds her wings and becomes human again, human and determined, suddenly, to do something.”

An older lady, Peggy Baxter, lives down the road and strikes up a conversation with Little Gold as the girl is hop-scotching her way home one day. They become friends, as Peggy sees herself in this young girl struggling with things beyond her control. Peggy doesn't know LG's situation at home, and LG (as she is often called) always says that Mum is in bed with a headache.

Peggy has had her share of heartache and is now often in severe physical pain. She, too, escapes by moving outside of herself. During one severe episode, she remembers another time in her youth:

“Each moment is stitched to the next – day becoming night becoming day again and still she is lying here, her body transforming into something hollow, a broken dogwhelk shell, perhaps, exposed on the peak of a pebble bank. The wind whistles through the shiny, calcified structures of her . . . that perception of herself as a broken shell, that was real, that happened. And somehow it was that, turning herself into a metaphor, that had enabled survival. She was something other than herself when herself was simply too hard to be.”

She can see something of this in LG, so she invites her over to help with yard work and dusting, and she makes sure to have plenty of biscuits and snacks for her. Then she invites her to help pack up some of her belongings. LG discovers many photos of pairs of women, obviously close friends, and we gradually see another side of Peggy.

Meanwhile, Malcy is being bullied by some boys he plays football with in the park across the road (he pretty much lives in the park). One of his mates has a father who often comes and picks them up and takes them in his big car to their fancy home. He always says hello “young lady” to LG, which she loathes, and keep offering to take her with them. She senses something false, distrusts the parents and tries to convince Malcy not to visit them.

And as the father gets more persistent, Malcy begins behaving more strangely and spending more time with that family. She finally goes along for a pool party one day, and let's just say it's not a pretty picture.

There are some pleasant scenes when Peggy is visited by her old friend Vi and they go on picnics, but all in all, this is a pretty grim picture of a family living in squalor, as plenty of families do. I often wonder how many children are pretty much raising themselves. Teachers can tell you the horror stories they're aware of but can't do anything about.

There was a bit too much focus on budding, or latent, or former sexuality for me, some of which was appropriate but some of which seemed unnecessary. There's nothing particularly graphic, but some of it seemed gratuitous, and I'm not sure exactly what the point was.

Thanks to NetGalley and Legend Press for the copy for review from which I've quoted.

Anne says

2017 is turning out to be a very very good book year! I christened it the 'year of the second novel' as so many

seconds are being published from authors whose debuts that I loved. Let us not forget the debut novelist though, I do love a good debut and was delighted to accept a pre-publication of Little Gold by Allie Rogers.

I was left quite speechless by this little gem of a book. It really did take me by surprise. From the opening paragraph, right through to the very last line, I was just totally consumed by Little Gold, her friends, her family and the events that were unfolding in front of my eyes.

Little Gold is an eleven-year-old girl, she's a bit tomboyish, the youngest child of three and living in Brighton. It's the hot summer of 1982 and most girls of her age are enjoying the heat, making the most of living by the sea and are generally carefree and oblivious to the wider world. Little Gold is not like most young girls. Her family is falling apart, her Dad has gone, her Mum spends most of her time in bed, with a whiskey bottle. Her older sister Ali tries to keep them fed, but she struggles with her own demons, and middle-child Malcy, although her older brother, needs to be protected. His wheezy chest, his scruffy shoes and his general vulnerability makes him the target of bullies, but also makes him very easy to manipulate.

Peggy Baxter is an old lady who lives on the same street. Lonely, chain-smoking, reflecting on her past and aware of the length of her future, she befriends Little Gold. Peggy's clean and comfortable house becomes something of an oasis for Little Gold, along with the Wagon Wheel biscuits, the rooms full of books and the stories of Peggy's past.

Not everything is sunny and shiny though, and beneath the tourist glitter and the hidden away behind the cloak of respectability is a dark threat that promises to wreck even more havoc on Little Gold's family. Whilst she can sense that something is wrong, she's unsure of just what it is. Her instincts tell her what to do and how to try to protect herself, and Malcy, but nobody will listen.

This is a beautifully written story that deals with coming-of-age alongside end-of-life. Little Gold's hopes and discoveries up alongside Peggy Baxter's regrets and memories is a triumph, and the overlapping thoughts and emotions of these two female characters is a wonder. Little Gold's character has a touch of Scout from To Kill A Mockingbird, and the overall feel of the structure of the story reminded me of the brilliant The Trouble With Goats and Sheep by Joanna Cannon.

I cannot recommend Little Gold highly enough. It really is a stunning first novel, full of love and beauty that masks darkness and pain. Incredibly accomplished. A truly fabulous story.

<http://randomthingsthroughmyletterbox...>

Angela M says

I'm frequently drawn to stories that feature the perspective of young children who many times are wiser and more in tune with what is happening around them than the adults. Most of these stories depict the coming of age of the young person as they face some stark realities, some times too soon in their young lives . Eleven year Little Gold is from a family in crisis. Her father leaves for another woman and her children and her mother can't cope seeking relief in pills and alcohol. This leaves LG and her older siblings Ali and Malcy to manage on their own and so they take care of each other as best they know how. It's endearing how Little Gold watches out for her older asthmatic brother, always trying to find his inhaler when he needs it . It will

tighten your gut as LG discovers the danger that Malcy is in as he gets closer to the parents of his friend. At times this is hard to read and it's quite disturbing towards the end and you'll be afraid that LG is being drawn into this dangerous situation too.

However, amid the sadness and some awful things befalling this family, there is love and caring and there are bright spots of hope. Among the bright spots is Peggy Baxter a character who makes this more than a coming of age story. It's also what I'd call a coming to terms story manifested in Peggy, a neighbor who is terminally ill and befriends LG when she is in desperate need of a friend. Peggy connects with LG, sees that she is hungry and alone, as she is evaluating the decisions she had made earlier in her life, and the relationship with her partner Vi that ended years before. Sad, haunting, scary yet hopeful as Peggy Baxter saves this broken family. I was taken by the writing from the first page and by Little Gold and Peggy, characters not soon forgotten. Definitely recommended.

I received an advanced copy of this book from Legend Press through NetGalley.

Beth Moore says

Thank you to the author, the publisher, and NetGalley for a free ARC of this book in exchange for my honest review! This coming-of-age debut novel didn't grab me right away, but it turned out to be one of the strongest novels I've read this year, and will undoubtedly be in my top 10. *Little Gold* is one of those books that burrows into your mind and soul and stays there for a good long time. It's the early 80's in Brighton, England and 12 year old Little Gold (LG) lives with her older sister Aly, her older brother Malcy, and a mother they can't rely on. LG is closet to Malcy, who is the only source of friendship she seems to have. One day LG meets an elderly neighbor, Peggy Baxter, and the two begin an unlikely friendship. They share stories, comfort one another, and ultimately rely on each other during a very difficult crisis. A coming-of-age story unlike any other, there are important issues addressed in this novel, which set it apart from many others in my mind. The author is not afraid to be real, and while often times very sad and depressing, the novel is also sweet and hopeful. I can't wait to see what else this debut author shows us in the future.

Peebee says

I've never read a book that started so slow and finished so strong. I'm not someone who abandons books typically, and I needed to read this one before it is released this week, but in the beginning, it was dense with description, depressing and heavily British, and I found it a heavy slog. But I kept going until suddenly I found myself in the midst of a real story, with engaging characters and dramatic tension, and I couldn't wait to find out what happens next. It's poignant and sweet, and while it doesn't completely stop being depressing, it does offer hope. Little Gold is a special character who will stick with me for a while.

I received this advance copy from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Lucy Cage says

Little Gold is an astonishing debut from Brighton-based author Allie Rogers. It is intensely evocative of a childhood in 1980s Brighton - nice sparks of memory from mentions of Wagon Wheels, football stickers,

perfectly-pitched period turns of phrase etc. - and draws the characters of Little Gold, her sister, brother and neighbour Peggy Baxter, with huge care and skill.

But what makes this book so remarkable is that it traces the friendship between a little girl on the cusp of adulthood - with all the bodily squeamishness and anxiety about who and what she is meant to be that can entail - with an older gay woman who is ordering and making sense of a life lived well but which has had its heartbreaks. There is something very beautiful and believable in the way this relationship is drawn; Peggy Baxter possesses all the calm, wisdom and humanity that Little Gold needs from the adults around her - especially as a child who is growing up queer in a world where gender roles are so defined and unbending - but cannot find from her utterly absent father and her broken, alcoholic mother.

The secondary narrative - that of Peggy and her lover Vi - is plaited into Little Gold's tale, contrasting Little Gold's beginnings with their endings. They are vivacious, loving, full of wit and fondness, but they are not perfect or without folly. There's nothing dramatic or sensational about their relationship: they just are who they are. There is such heart in them, such truth. They deserve to go down as one of the great queer couples in literature.

But Allie Rogers writes all her characters, not just the loveable ones, with compassion and nuance. The largely absent mother, devastated by her husband's departure, is no monster, although she is capable of monstrous lack of care in her failure to notice what is going on with each of her three variously damaged children or in the rapid deterioration of her home. She is not damned or irredeemable, she is simply human. Her children love her even when they are furious or distressed.

Ultimately, Little Gold, despite the darkness of the family's break-up, the chaos and grime of their surroundings and the wickedness of some of those that circle them, is about love. The importance and honour of being loved and loving other the human beings in one's life. Not just romantic love - Vi and Peggy's immense fondness for each other is well beyond romance - or familial love, but the care and kindness of one human being to another. Nothing more precious than that.

Louisa Campbell says

Superb! Left me breathless. Buy it!

Kara says

This is an absolutely beautifully written book, the characters are so tenderly drawn, the amazing insightful gentle, naive and courageous Little Gold and the earthy, loving, wise and sensitive Peggy Baxter. I will miss them both as I move away from this unforgettably beautiful book. It is hard but completely captivating reading and will go into my recommended books. Do, do read it, you will be profoundly moved and will leave enriched and knowing something more about all colours of love.

Wendy says

I took refuge from the world to indulge in the intense and emotive time travel of *Little Gold*. Its ups and downs chiselled into my soul, as the fallout from the car crash adolescence and its passengers' ongoing recovery is unquestionably raw.

It encompasses the affecting, nostalgic awkwardness of 80s life when 'twelve' should allow you a free ticket

to a carefree happy place, even though you feel your life is being scrutinised under an invisible microscope and the whole world is passing judgement. As clarity becomes clouded by self-consciousness, the subtle signs of neglect creep into a family bubble which is already close to bursting.

Between the life wrestling there is also time for reflection, as this story shows becoming acquainted with unfamiliar and trying situations has no age barrier. It revolves around an unlikely partnership formed between the dungaree clad, tree climbing 'Golden One' from number 167 and a retired, nicotine loving neighbour, Peggy Baxter, who has her own thoughts to put in order and a journey to share, which stray across the erratic path of ***Little Gold*** to give her direction when all seems lost.

The manner in which ***Little Gold*** looks out for her asthmatic brother, and her elder sister involuntarily adopts the role of parent to her two younger siblings, is just astoundingly written; nothing is obvious, just the gradual hint of an everyday routine taking the wrong turn down a road where money is directed away from the essentials, like food and washing powder.

Little Gold captures the spirit of an era where Wagon Wheels and Woolworths will be familiar to many. Where a cruel person nowadays has the benefit of social media to chuck anonymous insults at another, previously any offensiveness was shouted across the public spaces for all to hear – different platform, same effect, and all because of differences or ignorance.

There are times this book almost broke me. From the rippling apathy towards affecting circumstances, to the surge of something wicked that preys on innocence, growing up and growing older has never been more heartrending.

(My thanks to the publisher for providing a copy of this title. It is my pleasure to provide an unbiased review.)

alisha says

4.5/5

This book's beautiful prose painted a picture of a broken family and a broken child in the nostalgic setting of life in the 80's. The 12-year old character and narrator (Little Gold) has a fresh, new, and wonderful narrative voice, creating a story from the perspective of young child who seems to be wiser than the adults around her.

Then we have Peggy Baxter, an old, lonely, gay nicotine-addict who lives down the street. She and Little Gold (LG) alternate points of view, odd chapters belonging to LG and even to Peggy.

The juxtaposition of wise Peggy Baxter and this jumbling mess of adolescence and figuring out identity that is LG creates an unexpected yet beautiful picture. Their relationship is odd, crooked, uneven, but Peggy is the rock LG needs in her life when her family is falling apart (her father left) and who she thought she was is, too.

Honestly, this debut was one of the best I've ever read. Don't be fooled by my 4 stars; I only save my 5 stars for books that swept me off my feet and opened my eyes to parallel universes. And while Little Gold is certainly fresh, evocative, nostalgic, unique, gritty, and real, the book still has hints of debut-book clumsiness: some characters seem cliched or far-fetched (the "bullies") and some not quite as fleshed out (the

father who was the catalyst for the entire plot). However, the characters that do matter, LG and Peggy, are real and human, and Rogers makes sure you don't forget that. Their problems and hardships, while on completely different scales, are problems nonetheless, and you will find yourself rooting and cheering for them in the darkest of times. LG looking out for her asthmatic brother despite being younger than him, trying to figure out her father; who he is and what she thinks of him. Peggy and Vi's relationship; their reminiscing about old, carefree days, filled with youth and scandal and *fun*. And Peggy's life now, riddled with illnesses and problems. Their stories and the intertwining of them was absolutely breathtaking, and I cannot recommend this highly enough.

Thank you to Netgalley for providing me an ARC of this book in exchange for a honest review. All thoughts and opinions are solely mine.
