

# THE GARDENS OF EDIN

*A Novel*

ROSEY LEE

SNEAK  
PEEK



SAMPLE  
ONLY

UNCORRECTED  
PROOF

# THE GARDINS OF EDIN

A Novel

Rosey Lee



WATERBROOK

THE GARDINS OF EDIN is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Specifically, Edin, Georgia, is a fictional town. It is not based on the actual town of Eden, Georgia, which is located in Effingham County near the South Carolina border. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. (www.zondervan.com). The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica Inc.™

2024 WaterBrook Trade Paperback Original

Copyright © 2024 by Rosey Lee

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook,  
an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

WATERBROOK and colophon are registered trademarks of  
Penguin Random House LLC.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-0-593-44549-5  
Ebook ISBN 978-0-593-44550-1

The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

waterbrookmultnomah.com

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode

*Book design by Diane Hobbing*

*Flower illustrations based on the original image by AdobeStock/Ringele*

To my teachers: my parents, who were my first teachers; my preschool teachers, who made me try spinach; my Sunday school and Vacation Bible School teachers; my summer camp art and logic teachers; my church members who taught me sewing, acting, public speaking, how to manage a meal program, and how to throw a fabulous luncheon; the teachers who believed in me and nurtured my gifts; and even the teachers who challenged me to prove them wrong when they misjudged me.

## Chapter One

*How have I lasted in this family so long?* Ruth thought as she steered her golf cart toward Naomi's driveway. The cart bounced up and down along the old red-brick path, and Ruth wobbled along with it. She was tired of being jerked around—by the golf cart and the tensions brewing in her family. She wondered if the bumpy shortcut to her mother-in-law's cottage was symbolic of her convoluted placement in the Gardin family tree and the repercussions that came along with it.

Visitors usually parked in the small circular driveway in front of the house, where the asphalt was smooth, but Ruth rarely drove along the street to get to Naomi's cottage during the daytime. Although the women lived next door to each other on the Gardin family estate, their homes were separated by a couple of acres of deciduous trees, and the brick path connected the far end of Naomi's driveway to Ruth's backyard. It was the last original road on the estate, its bricks crafted and laid by the formerly enslaved people who settled the land and whose descendants comprised the family into which Ruth had married. Ruth treasured the path's history and convenience, but they weren't the reason she tolerated the uncomfortable commute. It was because she finally felt peaceful when she drove over the last brick, marking the spot where she and Beau had spent hours talking and stargazing when she first moved to Edin with Naomi.

After Ruth stopped the golf cart at the edge of the bricks, she took a long, deep breath, leaning into the headrest with her back slightly arched. The stretch reminded her of yoga class but did

little to ease the tension in her lower back. Once a regular attendee, Ruth hadn't gone to a yoga class in a year and a half, since the morning Beau died. But she visited the spot in Naomi's driveway almost every day, most often in the middle of the night when she couldn't sleep.

Dissatisfied with her stretch, Ruth opened her eyes. She stared up at the sky, thinking of Beau. Red, orange, and bright-yellow hues reflected off the thin clouds as the sun set. She marveled at the horizon, which felt like a fiery reminder that she was about to face a task she'd dreaded all week. Instead of backing down, Ruth was emboldened. She jumped out of the car like a Manx cat, landing flawlessly in the stiletto heels she'd worn since her 7:30 A.M. check-in meeting with the event planner she hired for the Gardin Family Enterprises Christmas party. With the gathering only a week away and this year being her first time relinquishing the party-planning duties since she married Beau, Ruth was nervous, especially given the media outlets and influencers scheduled to cover the high-profile event.

As Ruth sped up the front walk to Naomi's cottage, she smoothed the soft fabric of the black V-necked pencil dress she wore. She hardly noticed the multicolored flashing Christmas lights Naomi had placed in the bushes that afternoon. Ruth's schedule had been filled with back-to-back meetings since she took the helm of Gardin Family Enterprises after Beau's death, and it was beginning to wear on her. She was grateful when she noticed the small details she used to obsess about previously, but Ruth couldn't deal with Naomi's unauthorized holiday decisions. Though Christmas remained Ruth's favorite time of the year, she had no time to commit to her tradition of coordinating decorations at the four homes on the family estate. Without someone to rein her in, Naomi was prone to go overboard. She couldn't help it. A simple decorated bush could morph into a flood of string lights cascading from the fountain in the front



yard with a sea of candy canes and inflatables spilling into the street.

Ruth slowed as she accessed the steps of the wraparound porch, digging inside her black Brandon Blackwood tote until she found a scratched heart-shaped key chain. She inserted the single key in the door lock but decided the evening might go better if she rang the doorbell instead. As she eased the key from the lock, the door opened.

"I was wondering what took you so long to come up to the house. It's too early for you to be sleeping in the driveway again," Naomi said with a sly grin. She extended her arms in a broad V shape. With her silver curls falling below her shoulders and white oversized cardigan draping her petite frame, she looked like a mischievous angel.

"When did you see me sleep in the driveway?" Ruth asked as she crept toward Naomi, extending her arms to return the greeting.

"Almost every night," Naomi replied. She wrapped her arms around Ruth and squeezed while she rubbed her back.

"Well, I wish you'd told me. I might've appreciated some company," Ruth joked, attempting to mask her shock. The visit would be emotional enough. She needed to save her energy, so she focused on the familiar aroma that had hit her as she entered the house and had then intensified as she hugged Naomi. Despite the woman's ill-timed observation, Naomi gave the best hugs. Ruth held on for another second before she let go, savoring the buttery smell with hints of cinnamon and vanilla that meant Naomi had made an impromptu batch of snickerdoodles.

"I'm too cute to sleep outside. Camping was never my cup of tea. Speaking of tea, would you like some hibiscus tea?" Naomi asked as she sauntered down the hallway leading to the kitchen.

"Yes, that sounds good," Ruth said as she followed behind Naomi. She hoped to look as good as her mother-in-law did in

fitted jeans when she turned sixty-nine years old.

“By the way, I’m thinking of redecorating. I’ve got an appointment tomorrow with an interior designer. I think it’s time for another project. I feel like I need something to do.”

Ruth pretended not to be affected by the revelation that, as always, Naomi was a step ahead of her. “Okay,” Ruth said, the last syllable dragging out as the muscles tightened at the nape of her neck. Before they reached the kitchen, the doorbell chimed. “I’ll get it,” she said, angling to buy some time to regroup. “Go ahead. They’ll want some tea too.”

Ruth entered the foyer and peered into the large oval mirror opposite the door. *Why didn’t she tell me my hair is a mess?* Although the natural curls gathered at the top of her head were already neatly coiffed, she pulled and fluffed them while she inspected her makeup.

The doorbell rang again as she lowered her face to the peephole.

“Open up. It’s us, your favorite nieces,” the muffled voices said.

Even through the peephole, their flawless deep-brown skin, pouty lips, and prominent eyes made the sisters look like models in a Doublemint gum commercial.

Ruth took a deep breath and opened the door. Greeting Mary and Martha with a quick hug as they entered the foyer, Ruth marveled at how much the sisters looked more alike as they got older. Although sometimes confused for twins, the women were two years apart. They had such similar taste that they bought the same clothes even when they didn’t shop together.

“Hey, Ruth. Do you know you left your golf cart running? Are you okay?” Mary asked, handing Ruth her keys.

“Oh, I was rushing to get inside. Thank you. I have a lot on my mind. I . . . I guess I’m more distracted than I realized,” she said, lowering her voice to a whisper. “So, I think she suspects



we're up to something. Which one of you told her? She's talking about renovating. How can we convince her to move in with me if she's planning to update the house? And she baked snickerdoodles too. She knows."

"I bet Aunt Naomi is making tea. I'm going to go help," Martha said as she scurried past Ruth.

Ruth's head swung toward Mary. "Martha told her, didn't she?" she whispered. "A lot is going on at the company right now. I need everything to be perfect for the Christmas party. I don't have time for this."

Mary shrugged and followed her sister without answering Ruth's question.

Ruth sighed. *I'm gonna have to clean up their mess, just like when they were kids.* She followed the sisters into Naomi's kitchen, like ants following the scent left behind by their leader. Ruth pointed to the dry-erase board sitting on an easel in the center of the kitchen table. "Look at this," she said as she walked closer. "'The honor of your presence is requested at high tea. Please join me in the dining room.'" Ruth shook her head. "I told you she's on to us."

Martha dismissively waved her hands. "I didn't tell her, but she probably figured it out because we don't get together much anymore and we asked if we could come over today even though we have the Gardin Family Enterprises board meeting at your house tomorrow. You have to admit that a bunch of family time all of a sudden *is* a little strange. She put it together and realized we were up to something."

Martha nudged her sister.

"Yeah, that makes sense," Mary said as she backed away from Martha.

"I guess," Ruth replied. "You can say it. You're busy at the hospital and don't have time for us."

"That's not true," Martha said. "I—"

“Martha, remember when Aunt Naomi used to have us over for high tea in Atlanta when we were kids?” Mary asked. “We never wanted to stop playing when she called us to dinner, but we were interested when she called us to high tea instead.”

“And then we would race to see who could get to the bathroom first to wash our hands,” Martha said, then laughed.

“C’mon, Martha, let’s race like we used to,” Mary said.

Ruth wished Mary wouldn’t intrude when she tried to call Martha out, but Mary’s words packed a double punch, as the high-tea parties they remembered were Ruth’s idea. Somehow they didn’t recall *that* part. Being left out of cherished memories made Ruth feel only more insecure about her place in the family. *When will I be good enough to be included?* she wondered.

\* \* \*

RUTH AND NAOMI had been inseparable since Ruth married Marlon, Naomi’s son, after graduating from college. Naomi had lost her husband the year before, and she was elated when the newlyweds asked if Ruth could live with her in Atlanta while Marlon was deployed with the Air Force. Most daughters-in-law might have been put off by the arrangement, but Ruth loved living with Naomi. She spent all her free time with her, despite having many friends from college who stayed in Atlanta after graduation. The women were so close that Ruth felt unnatural calling Naomi *Mrs. Gardin*, so she called her *MIL* instead, turning the mother-in-law acronym into a nickname. After Marlon died while on active duty, their mutual loss drew the women even closer, so close that Ruth insisted on moving with Naomi when she decided to move onto the Gardin family estate in Edin.

Ruth had always enjoyed weekend trips to Edin, only eighty miles southwest of Atlanta. She was proud of the Gardin family’s history of leadership among the formerly enslaved people

who founded the town. Although she hadn't been excited about full-time rural living, she couldn't imagine life without Naomi. And once she got settled in Edin, she didn't miss the city as much as she thought she would. She also adored Naomi's preteen nieces back then, but things had changed over the years.

Mary darted through the living room toward the bathroom, with Martha following behind closely. In an attempt to cut Mary off, Martha bumped into the sofa table, which held stacks of photos Naomi had been sorting before they arrived. Ruth spread her arms and pushed her body against the table, preventing memories from cascading to the floor.

"Oh, thanks. You always have impeccable timing," Martha sneered.

"Uh-huh," Ruth said, opting to save her energy for the battle with Naomi that lay ahead. She pushed the photos back a few inches and noticed that one of them had fallen on the dark-oak floor, just beyond the baby grand piano. Already frustrated with how the evening was progressing, Ruth considered leaving the photo where it landed, but curiosity caused her to linger and she flipped it over. She remembered going with Naomi to a family cookout by the lake shortly after they moved back to Edin, but she had forgotten how sad her mother-in-law was back then. She was about Ruth's age, forty-eight, in the photo. Naomi's skin glowed after a week of gardening on the estate, but Ruth recognized her forced smile and the distance in her eyes. Over the past several months, she saw the same things on her own face each time she looked in a mirror.

Minutes flew by as Ruth sat on the piano bench, staring at the photo. She startled when she heard Naomi yell her name from the dining room.

"It doesn't take that long to wash your hands. What are you doing?" Naomi continued.

"Just looking at the photos by the piano. Be there in a min-

ute,” Ruth replied, sliding the photo into the interior pocket of her tote bag. She wasn’t sure what she would do with the picture, but she wanted it to be with her wherever she went.

As Ruth washed her hands in the bathroom next to the dining room, she grew more worried that the sisters weren’t taking her warnings seriously. She half dried her hands and hurried to join the other women.

“Aunt Naomi made all my favorites!” Mary said as Ruth entered the dining room.

“I did, and I may have a special treat for dessert,” Naomi sang.

“No! Not my favorite snickerdoodles?” Mary asked playfully.

“Yep, but I made the plant-based version you serve in the restaurant!” Naomi said, bobbing her head from side to side in a dancing motion.

Mary licked her lips. She was falling for Naomi’s plan. Ruth had seen the dynamic play out many times over the years. Mary was going to support whatever strategy Naomi had concocted.

Ruth loved when Naomi baked, but she wasn’t in the mood for cookies anymore. How could she think about dessert when she wasn’t sure how she’d make it through dinner? She slid into her usual seat next to Naomi.

After Naomi said grace, Ruth removed the pressed linen napkin from her plate and nestled it on her lap, revealing the delicate gold floral pattern on Naomi’s wedding china. Ruth usually hated avocado green, but the color gave a regal effect on the exterior of the china in contrast with the cream-colored interior and handles. Ruth couldn’t remember the last time Naomi had used the plates. Instead of getting them out for family gatherings, Naomi preferred to admire them on the top shelf of the nineteenth-century stepback hutch she bought when she moved to Edin. Ruth had convinced her not to refinish the cupboard’s chipped dark-green and cream paint. Its contrast with the pristine china created a stunning classic-meets-modern design aes-

thetic and served as a visual reminder to Ruth that she belonged on the estate.

“So, what’s the special occasion, MIL?” Ruth probed.

Martha and Mary didn’t look at Ruth. They maintained their focus on the dishes they passed back and forth to each other and filled their plates with Caesar salad, garlic green beans, sautéed mushrooms, roasted butternut squash, and homemade dinner rolls. Ruth wasn’t sure if they had come up with their own plan since she had deviated from the subtle approach the three of them had agreed to take. But Ruth didn’t care. She figured the dirty work would be left to her anyway. She might as well get it over with.

“Just a nice Friday evening meal with the family,” Naomi said with a smile.

Ruth exhaled. “MIL, it’s been a long week. Can we make this easy? Please just tell us what’s on your mind.”

“Fair enough,” Naomi replied, dabbing the corner of her mouth with her napkin. “Something tells me y’all are here to stage some sort of intervention, but none of that will be going on tonight.” She turned to Ruth. “I’m not moving in with you. I don’t want to leave my house.”

Ruth ignored her hunger pains and the sweet aroma of the button mushrooms that sat in front of her on the table. “You’re home all the time,” she said. “That’s the problem. I’m worried you’re starting to isolate yourself from us. What’s going on?”

“I’ve been going out more, but you’ve been so obsessed with running Gardin Family Enterprises that you haven’t noticed,” Naomi replied, fiddling with the sparkling diamond stud earring in her right ear.

A smirk developed on Martha’s face, but Ruth pretended not to see it. She was too busy looking at Naomi’s earrings, which Beau gave her on his and Ruth’s twentieth wedding anniversary. After he died, Naomi went from donning the two-carat studs

nearly daily to wearing them only at events she said Beau wouldn't have wanted to miss. Ruth began to realize that she had grossly underestimated her mother-in-law's strategy for the gathering.

"You're right," Ruth replied. "It seems I've missed some important things. But you threw a tea party just to tell us you refuse to move in with me? Why go through all this?"

"Yeah, what can we do to make it better?" Martha asked, popping up from her seat and putting her arm around Naomi. As she rose, she knocked her fork across her plate, hurling the garden green beans and squash across the table. They landed on Ruth's empty plate.

Martha inched closer to Naomi. "Sorry, Ruth," she said with a half smile.

"No problem," Ruth replied dryly.

"I want to see y'all more often. We live on the same property—land our ancestors bought and handed down to us. We can get to one another's houses in minutes, but we barely spend any time together anymore. We've gotta do better," Naomi pleaded. "We only have each other left now."

Their family was small, and now with Beau gone and their son, M.J., away in graduate school, Naomi, Mary, and Martha were the only remaining Gardin family members in Edin. Ruth enjoyed being with Naomi, but it was hard to sacrifice her rare free time if Mary and Martha were also invited. It had become harder to manage the tension between them without Beau as a buffer. As Naomi spoke, Ruth wondered how she could spend more time with her mother-in-law without including them.

"But we just had Thanksgiving dinner together," Martha whined as she returned to her chair.

Naomi squinted. "Are you serious? You and Mary hardly ate anything at Thanksgiving, and you left early. Before that, we hadn't all been together since the breast cancer awareness lun-

cheon at church a whole month before. And we were only there together because you were the keynote speaker. Mary couldn't even sit with us because she catered it, so the luncheon doesn't count!"

Ruth buried her head in her hands.

"Speaking of holidays, didn't we talk about rules for our Christmas decorations?" Mary asked. "Aunt Naomi, your lights are tacky, so don't be mad when you come outside tomorrow and can't find them."

"Don't touch my lights, young lady!" Naomi said, wagging her finger.

"I will make no promises," Mary said, cackling.

Ruth lifted her head. "Could we be serious and get back to the topic? Would it help if *I* moved in with *you*?" she asked.

"My goodness, child, no," Naomi responded. "You live right next door. I know it's hard being in that big house by yourself since Beau died and with M.J. away at school, but I'm used to having my own space."

Martha rested her fork on her plate and leaned forward. "Besides, Ruth, I couldn't let you do that. *I* could move in. We appreciate what you've done for our family, but you've got so much on your plate at the company." The words flew out of her mouth so melodically that it was as if she had rehearsed them for years and saved them for the perfect time.

"That's enough," Naomi said. "No, you will each stay in your own home. I think I've made my point clear. I'll see you at Ruth's tomorrow, so maybe we can figure out a plan for regular family time then."

"Fine," Martha said, lowering her eyes. She turned toward Ruth. "Please pass the tea. And what are we meeting about tomorrow, anyway?"

Still distracted by Martha's earlier comment, Ruth stared down at the green beans and squash that Martha had flung to



her plate. *They really don't want me here anymore.* She felt defeated but tried not to let it show.

"Ruth, the tea, please," Martha said. "And what are—"

"Oh," Ruth said. She grasped the delicate teapot, her hands shaking slightly. "Sorry, the pot is still a little hot," she said as she tilted it toward the matching cup Martha held. "I'd like to provide some updates and talk through plans for the company in the upcoming year." She steadied her hand, thinking of the photo she had found on the floor beside the piano. Then she forced a smile.

\* \* \*

THE COUNTDOWN TIMER on the control pad of Ruth's house alarm was almost at twenty seconds. She wiped her puffy eyes and tried entering her alarm code for the third time, smudging damp mascara on the buttons. The chiming finally ended. *Thank goodness. The last thing I need is the alarm going off and Mary and Martha running over here to see what happened.* She couldn't bear for them to see her like this and know that they'd caused her to lose her composure after all.

Ruth kicked off her shoes and looked toward the staircase to yell up to Beau, but then she remembered he wasn't there. When Beau was alive, he rarely had to intervene in family arguments. Just the thought of his doing so kept the Gardin women from going too far. Ruth could never figure out how he exerted so much influence, especially since Naomi was older, but she was glad it kept her life peaceful. The women seemed afraid of disappointing Beau. They placed him on a pedestal, but her relationship with him was different. She loved and respected him too, but they functioned as partners at home and at work. As Ruth took on more responsibility at Gardin Family Enterprises, he coached her and helped her understand the nuances of relationships—the

professional ones and those within the family. Now she had to figure things out on her own.

Martha's words echoed in Ruth's head, and they stung: "*We appreciate what you've done for our family.*" Ruth sat on the edge of the stairs and began to cry again. "*Our*" family. *Like it's just "theirs."* *Like I'm still not part of it after twenty-six years. I mean, have I not earned a place here? What do I have to do to be accepted? I've been married to two of their cousins. I had a chance to escape, but I stuck around.*

"This is my family too!" she yelled between sobs. She cried so hard that she didn't realize she was kneeling on the stairs and gripping the rectangular cutouts on the iron spindles until her hands began to ache. She let go. Her body fell against the spindles, and she landed on her rear end.

It felt good to release the pent-up emotion she'd been carrying around, but she wondered if her tears were about more than the evening at her mother-in-law's house. She recalled that her therapist, Shari, had recommended that she ask herself two questions the next time this happened, only she couldn't remember what they were. Those types of assignments always made her uncomfortable, but she had too much at stake with the family business meeting the following day not to give it a try. She couldn't afford to have a meltdown there.

Ruth ran up the stairs to the second floor. Within seconds, she passed M.J.'s bedroom and two guest bedrooms. She paused as she touched the glass knob on the antique french door to Beau's study. She revered the space and wouldn't dishonor it by rushing and inadvertently displacing anything inside. She never spent much time in the room when Beau was alive. It was too stuffy for her contemporary taste. Despite the large windows on both sides of the desk, the office was cast in shadows. Recessed lighting accentuated the dark wood in the ornate coffered ceiling and wall-to-wall bookcases, making the study reminiscent of a castle. She

referred to it as the library in conversation with other people because she didn't want to divulge that she used Beau's office regularly but hadn't yet removed any of his belongings in the year and a half since his death. Aside from her journal and a box of tissues, everything in the office was just as Beau left it, and Ruth liked it that way. In her heart, it was still his space, and she wasn't ready to do anything yet to make it her own.

Ruth flipped the light switch, and her eyes darted to the tattered therapy journal on the far-right corner of the desk. It was exactly where she'd placed it after last week's session, but she still felt relieved that it was there. She opened it to the page held by the brass monogrammed bookmark, the last gift from her beloved Beau. The questions jumped out at her as boldly as Shari had announced them verbally: *"What is the feeling? Where does it come from?"* She paused for a moment, asked them of herself over and over again, and then started writing in her journal.

*I feel very angry and hurt and disappointed right now. It hurts so much that my whole body feels light and numb, like there is a vacuum in the center of my chest and it is trying to take my breath away from me. But I'm not going to let it. I felt helpless before, but now I feel like I can take control. Like I can do something about this, even though I don't know what I can do, because I really want to run away. But why should I run? It's my family too. It is. It just is. They can't take that away from me. But more than that, I have invested years in the family. I have helped to nurture the bonds in the family AND build the company. Martha and Mary say they appreciate my efforts, but I am afraid they don't value them now. When Martha said, "We ap -*

preciate what you've done for our family," it felt like she was talking to me like I was an employee instead of part of the family. I think Martha said the same thing to the funeral home staff when we made the arrangements for Beau's funeral. That's not something she should say to me too! The funeral home has always come through for our family during our greatest times of need over the years, but they're not in the family. Who does Martha think she is? Is she trying to tell me that even though I've invested all these years, I still don't have a family? It's like she's saying the family is only theirs and so they can take away something that even death shouldn't be able to affect. I've chosen this family twice, once through Marlon and then through Beau, but now they don't want to choose me. What more do I have to do to prove myself?

Ruth's pen froze in her right hand. The fingers of her left hand tapped on the desk. She squeezed her eyes closed as she took a deep breath. When she opened them, tears fell onto the page of her journal, and words rushed to her mind. She began to write again.

I guess I'm afraid that my relationships with Naomi, Mary, and Martha (yeah, I put Martha last on purpose) will end up like my relationship with my mother. That's it. Hold on, does this stuff work? Wait until I tell Shari this! She won't believe it! Okay, she will believe it, because she's the one who told me to do this.

Ruth fanned the teardrops on the journal page with her hand. *I'll have to leave this open to dry.* She reached for the box of tissues she'd placed on Beau's desk the week before, but it was empty. The extra-large boxes were no match for her nightly crying sessions. Her tears always fell as quickly as time flew. Ruth opened the right-middle desk drawer and lowered her head until her eyes focused on a vintage burnt-wood box. Her fingers caressed the floral carvings in the wood as she lifted the container and sat it on the desk. She forced the stubborn metal latch open and removed the handkerchief on top. She folded the upper edge and dabbed her eyes, inhaling a subtle hint of citrus and cardamom from Beau's favorite cologne left on the soft bamboo fabric. She felt almost as comforted as she would have if Beau were there to wipe her tears.

Ruth let out a big yawn. It had been a long evening. She was ready to wind down and at least try for a good night's sleep. As she stood to begin her bedtime preparation, she noticed a bright-yellow envelope in the handkerchief box. Her eyes welled up again when she saw her name on it, in Beau's handwriting. She ripped open the envelope, straying from her usual compulsion to use the letter opener a few inches from her hand. A waterfall of tears ran down her face at the sight of the gold-engraved bumblebee on the outside of the folded card. Bumblebee was Beau's nickname for her because of her persistence in bringing out the best in him and the family business. She read the note aloud.

*My Dearest Bumblebee,  
It has been my greatest honor to be your husband.  
Thank you for choosing me and blessing me with  
your love. Thank you for always believing me, even  
when I doubted myself and my ability to be the part-  
ner and provider you deserved. Thank you for help-  
ing me learn to live each day to its fullest, especially*

*during my recent health issues. I know that the business and family may become challenging at times. Even if they test you, remember that you are one of us and that you have everything you need to find your way forward. Don't give in to fear. My prayer for you is that you will continue to be true to yourself and trust your inner voice. It led you to us, and we are all the better because of it.*

*Forever Your Beau*

There wasn't a dry spot left on the handkerchief. Ruth retrieved another one and tucked the box back in the drawer. She clutched the note to her chest as she walked toward the lighting panel next to the office doors, marveling that she discovered the note on the day she needed it most. She turned off the lights before grabbing the chenille throw at the edge of the sofa and cuddling with the oversized pillows, the note placed a couple of inches away near the sofa arm. She'd hated when Beau fell asleep reading on the office sofa and ended up spending the night there. But after her emotional evening ended on such a reassuring note, she decided there was nowhere else she would rather be on the night before her big meeting.

## About the Author

ROSEY LEE writes hopeful stories about complicated families and complex friendships.

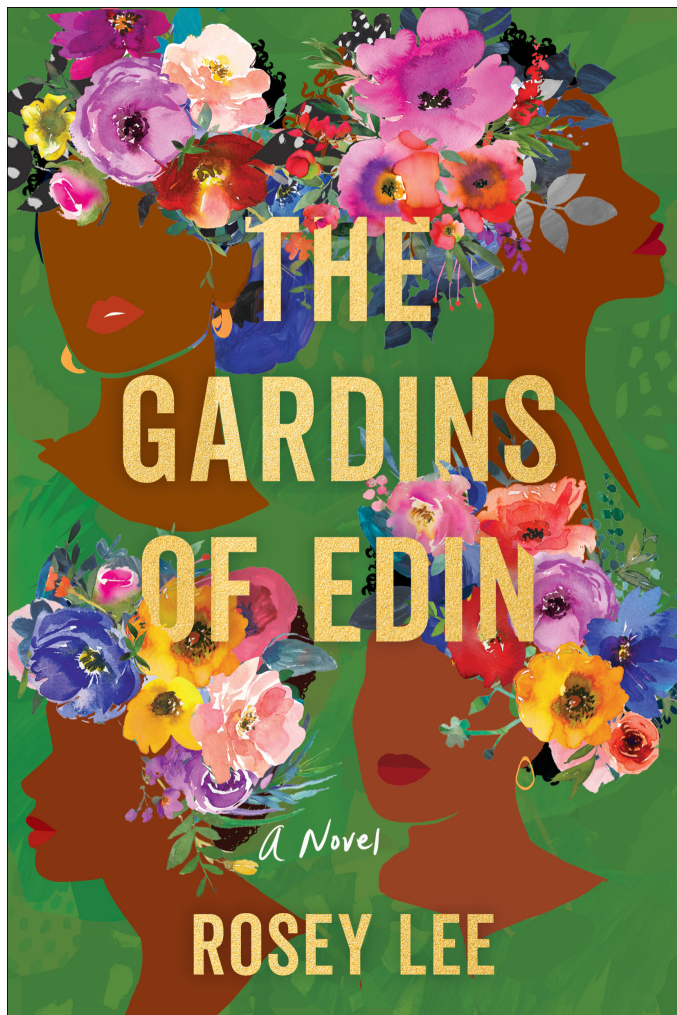
As a native of the Westbank of New Orleans, Louisiana, who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, Rosey writes about the people, traditions, and food that anchor her to the South. She enjoys cooking, listening to live music, and occasional bursts of fanatical bargain shopping.

*The Gardins of Edin* is her debut novel.



## About the Type

THIS BOOK was set in Sabon, a typeface designed by the well-known German typographer Jan Tschichold (1902–74). Sabon's design is based upon the original letter forms of sixteenth-century French type designer Claude Garamond and was created specifically to be used for three sources: foundry type for hand composition, Linotype, and Monotype. Tschichold named his typeface for the famous Frankfurt typefounder Jacques Sabon (c. 1520–80).



**Continue reading...order today!**

**BUY NOW**



**WATERBROOK**