



# Stones for Ibarra

*Harriet Doerr*

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Richard and Sara Everton, just over and just under forty, have come to the small Mexican village of Ibarra to reopen a copper mine abandoned by Richard's grandfather fifty years before. They have mortgaged, sold, borrowed, left friends and country, to settle in this remote spot; their plan is to live out their lives here, connected to the place and to each other.

The two Americans, the only foreigners in Ibarra, live among people who both respect and misunderstand them. And gradually the villagers--at first enigmas to the Evertons--come to teach them much about life and the relentless tide of fate.

## **Stones for Ibarra Details**

Date : Published January 8th 1985 by Penguin Books (first published 1984)

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Author : Harriet Doerr

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## **From Reader Review Stones for Ibarra for online ebook**

### **Betsy Fasbinder says**

I wanted to love this book...people I trust tout it as their favorite, but I just didn't. Perhaps it's the disjointed nature of the stories, but I just couldn't get involved with any of the characters. The writing has some beautiful little gems along the way--exquisite when you find them--but I'm not sure I found them worth the digging. Perhaps if I'd "gotten it" earlier that this was not a single story, but a series of barely connected stories, I might have enjoyed it more. I kept trying to tie things together and follow the threads that never fully connect.

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### **Mary Lynn Hendrickson says**

This is one of a handful of books that I always buy used in order to give away to people. What I liked best about it (as well as her "Consider this, Senora") as the poetic prose. Not too heavy, not too light. Not too flowery, not too sparse. Just right. Musical in a sense, but not obviously so. The kind of writing that's more a window than a door to help you see the beauty and sacredness that's inherent in "everyday life."

What I especially liked in "Stones," however, was the very artful way -- subtle, not preachy or obnoxious -- that North American lifestyle (idealizing the individual or individual family) was compared and contrasted with Latin American lifestyle (idealizing the communal). Growing up in small-town North America, in real village in rural parts, I'm able to recognize what's good and bad in both -- neither "the individual" nor "the community" should be idealized, in my opinion, because our creator and our country intended both, in balance, with some bad consequences if we go to either extreme -- but "Stones" clearly critiques North America's love of "self" while managing to do it sympathetically, favoring the mining village's love of "communal" while managing to temper it with some humor. What's nice is that, at the end, the lead characters seem to get the message.

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### **Karen says**

I actually thought about how much I love this author when I picked the name Harriet for our daughter. Very nice voice in her writing.

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### **Lorrie Baker says**

A book that made me cry. That doesn't happen often. So beautifully written. If you have spent time in the desert Southwest you will be reminded of simple landscapes that are often taken for granted. This is also a love story of exceptional beauty of a place, a people and a man.

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## **Numidica says**

Not as good as her other Mexico novel, *Consider This, Senora*, but a good one nonetheless.

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## **Shawn Mooney says**

A delightful, unusual little novel, Harriet Doerr's debut when she was 73. A middle-aged American couple uproot themselves, moving to a small Mexican town to reopen the copper mine the man's grandfather had abandoned a half century before. The relations between the townspeople and the Americans are chronicled with lyrical, Marquezian verve. Most of Doerr's eccentric choices about what to put in and what to leave out were intriguing; the chapters that focused on the non-believing Americans's encounters with the local priests and nuns fell flat, however. But what an odd little gem of a novel!

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## **Jennifer Hughes says**

I read this at the request of someone who has taught it for years and thinks it's all that. For me it was a mixed bag. The prose is elegant and almost deceptively simple. So why not 5 stars?

Each chapter is basically a stand-alone story. It's kind of a patchwork of all of these stories of different characters and situations and how they all come together to make up this small Mexican town Ibarra. Where I got hung up is that is that I never had the drive to pick up the book and see what was going to happen next, because there was no plot, per se. The author uses some odd devices that were off-putting, like announcing when she introduced the main characters that the husband was also going to die in 6 years, and how and where. That kind of "info bombing" throughout the book bothered me, because you never get the tension of not knowing. It's all just kind of laid out there for the reader like food on a buffet table, and you just move from dish to dish and sample each one. Which can be nice, but it is definitely different than a typical novel plot approach.

So it's tricky to review because the writing itself was so lovely, and despite the smorgasbord, Doerr does finally bring it all together on the last page and let you into her reasoning of why she wrote it the way she did. But that was a LONG time to wait with no little tasty tidbits to keep me hanging on. I wouldn't discourage someone from reading this, but go into it knowing that it is more of a short story collection on related characters in the same town, and I think you will be a more satisfied reader than I was.

I think books that employ the story-piecing technique a little more successfully, weaving them together into an overall plot arc, are *How to Make an American Quilt* and *The Joy Luck Club*. BUT if you only read those, then you also wouldn't get to enjoy Doerr's lovely, unique, sparse voice. So happy reading, and choose well.

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## **Nina says**

You should read this book even if it's not really your kind of thing. A couple, one just over 40 and the other just under, move from the Bay Area to rural Mexico to start up the husband's old family mine. The book feels more like a collection of short stories than a novel. The language is lyrical without being gushing and

Jake will be happy to know that Doerr never dips into magical realism. There might be odd coincidences and an oddly humorous but sad bit in which an old priest is followed around by all the village dogs all the time, but there are no miracles.

This isn't a travel book, nor is it some of that "see how poverty makes people noble" crap. Mostly it's about the wife's journey to both understand and deliberately misunderstand the people around her and the events in her life.

It's sad but not that bleak. More on the "relentless tide of fate" side than the "all doom all the time" side. I take great solace in the fact that this was Doerr's first book published and she was 68. That means I have about 34 more years before it's too late for me to publish my great American novel.

Bibliovore says: it tastes like Chicken mole from Montero's Cafe. Chiles with chocolate means it's rich but not sweet.

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### **Emily says**

It feels like assigned reading for a high school English class. Like it is probably good for me somehow but I'm just not getting it. I didn't connect to any of the stories or characters. My favorite part was being done.

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

I really wanted to love this book, mostly because it's the first novel written by an elderly woman, and I love the idea of late-life accomplishment. And I did like it, but I didn't love it. The story was reasonably interesting and the writing style was okay, but neither really wowed me. But I know some readers think this is a wonderful book and I did enjoy it so I wouldn't want to dissuade anybody from reading it.

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### **Kate says**

I borrowed this book from the library based on Lisa Roberts' excellent review. This is such a gentle, beautiful story about a North American couple moving to a small village in a remote part of Mexico to reopen his grandfather's ore mine. Harriet Doerr won the National Book Award for this descriptive novel of their life, surroundings and neighbors. Being agnostic in Catholic Mexico provided a background to the story as well as a framework for Richard and Sara's social lives. Richard succeeds in reopening the mine and providing jobs for many of the villagers. Sara craving her North American privacy, manages to negotiate relationships with servants, nuns and priests as well as learning to trust and make friends. The description of the land as well as the weather completed this novel for me.

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### **Elizabeth (Alaska) says**

I always glance at the copyright page of a book, and in this case I immediately panicked. For the current challenge, I needed to be reading a book published in 1984, and the copyright started with 1978 (and then

'81, '83, and '84). Sometimes the GR information is incorrect, but this was going to be beyond disappointing - and I was going to have to scurry around and find a replacement book. It turns out that the earlier copyrights were for stories published before the final publication of the novel. Yes, stories. This is definitely a novel, but the construction is somewhat similar to *Olive Kitteridge*.

Sometimes reading a lot of stories by a single author can feel repetitious, and this is true about some of the chapters in this. Here is the story of Richard and Sara Everton, but there is also the story of Ibarra, a village remotely located in the interior mountains of Mexico. Some 50 years earlier than our story was the 1910 Revolution, when Richard Everton's grandfather was forced to abandon his mining operation and flee the country. The Evertons return to Ibarra to reclaim the mine, to reinvigorate the village, and to live their lives.

The driver of the station wagon is Richard Everton, a blue-eyed, black-haired stubborn man who will die thirty years sooner than he now imagines. On the seat beside him is his wife, Sara, who imagines neither his death nor her own, imminent or remote as they may be. Instead she sees, in one of its previous incarnations, the adobe house where they intend to sleep tonight.

With this forecasting in the first paragraph, we know - or think we know - where the story is heading. It is no spoiler, then, to say that we come to know Sara and the villagers as Richard gets sicker and sicker. I had great empathy for Sara. Although we had a positive outcome (as Sara and Richard do not), last fall my husband and I looked squarely in the face of his cancer. Most of the early chapters did not involve much emotion, and I was not entirely prepared for the last 20 or so pages. I should have, but did not, expect such a powerful depiction of a wife's loss. And it is this last that nudges the story over the 4-star line into my 5-star reads.

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## Daniel Chaikin says

### 11. *Stones for Ibarra* by Harriet Doerr

**published:** 1984

**format:** 214 page paperback

**acquired:** inherited from my neighbor upon his move

**read:** Feb 20-24

**rating:** 4

Doerr's claim to fame seems to be that she published her first book, this one here, at the ripe young age of 74. She outlived her husband, who died of leukemia, and then went back to school to complete her unfinished BA and that led to here.

Gentle and atmospheric are two things I struck me initially on starting this. Richard Everton abandons his career in the US to re-open a family owned mine in the middle of nowhere desert of Mexico. He brings his wife, Sara, and they move into an old run-down mansion in a tiny town, find plenty of locals willing to work the mine. Shortly afterward he is diagnosed with leukemia. Most of this is autobiographical.

The novel isn't like a novel. It has the feel of linked short stories, with each chapter focusing on one character or oddity of the region. Several were published prior to the book. First Sara is generally amused. She struggles to learn Spanish well enough to have clear communication, but wonders and is charmed by the passionate and brutal Catholic community she now lives within. But these stories seems to get darker, and Richard gets sicker, and husband and wife remain non-religious outsiders (called North Americans), wealthy benevolent respected and necessary heathens. Eventually the stories settle more on Sara and her mental and

emotional struggles with her husband's sickness, and somewhat with her grief after his passing. There is a cumulative gravitas. And there is a lot of Mexico. Still thinking about it.

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### **Lisa says**

Author, Harriet Doerr's debut novel was published when she was 74 years old. She went back to school at the urging of her son, to finish her BA after surviving her husband and went on to become a Wallace Stegner fellow. She writes a fiction novel or novella from her experiences in Mexico.

The story is gentle and revealing of North American life compared to that of rural Ibarra, Mexico. Sarah and Richard, a couple in their 40s leave California to reopen a mine in Ibarra abandoned by Richard's family many years earlier. Their experiences with the residents of way of life in Ibarra help Sarah and Richard learn and grow. The voice is like none I've read and it is beautiful and lyrical in nature, it's a series of vignettes exploring Sarah & Richard and their neighbors.

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### **Sera says**

I struggled with the rating for this book, because it probably deserves 5 stars. However, I as the reader had a little difficulty putting everything together so that the lower rating more likely represents a deficiency on my part instead of a commentary on the book itself.

Nevertheless, this book is beautifully written, because the rhythm is very lyrical in nature. It's about a couple who move to Mexico in the 1960s to re-establish a mine that the husband's grandfather had abandoned in 1910. The couple's story is told through a series of vignettes that depict the numerous differences between Mexican and American cultures. What's interesting is that people die every day in this small Mexican town in strange and sometimes violent ways, and the husband in book, Richard, we learn at the onset of the book will also be dead within 5 years of the couple's move to Mexico. There is a connection between his death and those of the others in the book that I haven't quite put together in my mind yet. Even so, I became very wrapped up in the Ibarra community, and I had such admiration for the couple who moved there. They were the only foreigners in that town, and they had such a generosity about them, that I found them to be quite compelling as characters.

This book isn't for everyone, but if you are looking for a unique read, you may want to check this one out.

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