



When the Stars Sang

Caren J. Werlinger

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Nearly twenty-five years ago, Kathleen Halloran's brother drowned during the last summer they ever spent with their grandmother on a remote island off Maine's coast. Like a siren's call she can't resist, Kathleen is pulled back to Little Sister Island. She leaves her job and her girlfriend, packs up her few belongings, and moves into her grandmother's cottage.

Molly Cooper loves life on Little Sister, where the islanders take care of their own. Kathleen Halloran doesn't belong here, and her arrival stirs up unwelcome memories for the islanders—including Molly's brother. Molly is certain Kathleen will pack up at the first big blow. When she doesn't, Molly begins to see maybe there's more to Kathleen than she thought.

Sometimes, before you can move forward, you have to look back.

Words: 95,480

When the Stars Sang Details

Date : Published March 3rd 2018 by Corgyn Publishing, LLC

ISBN :

Author : Caren J. Werlinger

Format : Kindle Edition 365 pages

Genre : Romance, LGBT, Lesbian Romance, Fiction

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From Reader Review When the Stars Sang for online ebook

vacatedboat says

I wasn't going to review this because it's already been done so well by so many others, but I'm still thinking about it more than 24 hours later. So, here we are.

'When the Stars Sang' was an ok romance, but a great book. I loved the island and supporting characters more than the main romance that was the focus of the story. Kathleen and Molly were fine together, but their love affair didn't shine. There was little chemistry, but their relationship was more about understanding, respect, and trust than it was about flirtation and passion. Regardless, I really enjoyed reading 'When the Stars Sang' because I loved the sense of community and the fun side characters so much. The relationships amongst family and the ties of all inhabitants of Little Sister Island were really wonderful.

I am mainly a romance reader at this point (I never in a million years would have suspected that 5 years ago), but I also love books that can take me someplace I've never been and experience things I will never experience. I spent a lot of time looking up remote, but inhabited, islands while I was reading this, so I also found myself learning little things along the way. I think I romanticized the lifestyle more than the couple in this book. I grew up in what, at the time, felt like an isolated village in Vermont. We had roughly 700 residents, but Little Sister has (it's estimated by one of the mains) 80 or so residents. I can't even fathom that type of isolation out in the middle of the ocean, but each resident treats the other as family; they trust, respect, take care of, and depend on one another and I just found it so comforting.

Anyway, I definitely recommend this book, not for the romance (though it wasn't awful), but the setting and community that exists in the world Werlinger has created. I loved it and will definitely be reading through her list of books. I've read a few, but so far, this has been my favorite.

Diane says

Lovely read! Heartwarming at times with some very good storytelling and writing. Recommended to everyone!

** lov2! - huge 'THANK YOU' for this rec. :)

Pin says

This is my third full five stars book by Caren J. Werlinger, and my favorite so far. She has a great way with words and really knows how to write an excellent and compelling story. In the beautiful and heartwarming When the Stars Sang I would not change a single word because it is perfect the way it is (plot, pacing, characterization, setting... just about everything). Even the e-book is very attractive from a technical point of view (formatting, error-free, cover...), an example how it should be done. All in all, the whole package is for my 5-stars-plus shelf. Highly recommended for everyone!

5 plus stars

June 27, 2018

Lex Kent says

4.25 Stars. I really enjoyed this read. It was much better than I expected and really a nice surprise. This just reminded me that I need to read more of Werlinger's books. Her writing was really well done and the book had a great flow. I believe I would put this in the drama-romance category.

Kathleen is running from a dysfunctional relationship, with her girlfriend and parents, to live in her in deceased grandmother's cottage. The cottage is on a small island off the coast of Maine. Molly is the sheriff of Little Sister Island. The community is close knit and they don't trust outsiders easily. But Molly can't stop thinking about Kathleen. Do these two have a chance at a relationship, or will outside forces stop them from being together?

As I said earlier, the writing is just wonderful. This book is actually on the longer side, but I was never bored for a second. Not only did Werlinger write the two main characters well, the whole island came alive. This is one of the better written cast of secondary characters I have read in a drama-romance book. All had their unique personalities; even the damn dog was great. I'm really in awe how well this whole island came alive for me.

I said this is a drama-romance because it is about families and dealing with tragedies, but also love and belonging. I went from tearing up one minute to a huge smile on my face. This book pulled different emotions out of me and I enjoyed every second of it.

There is a romance of course. Though I do have to say the only thing missing in this book for me was a little more chemistry. It took a long time before I saw any spark between the main couple. The sex scenes are all fade to black. I don't really think that is why the characters had less chemistry for me. But I think it was a missed opportunity to strengthen the chemistry. I do want to make clear though, this couple absolutely had a bond together. I believed that love was happening between them. It is just more about two people connecting through love, than a steamy passionate love. I hope that makes some sense. The point is I still enjoyed the romance.

This is only the third book I have read by Werlinger, but it is absolutely my favorite. If you are a drama-romance fan and are looking for a well written, enjoyable book, give this a chance. I don't think you will be disappointed. I can't wait to read more of her books, especially her fantasy series.

An ARC was given to me by Netgalley, for a honest review.

CLo says

Really enjoyable

This is the first book I have read from this author and am now looking into her other ones. I really enjoyed the book. Its more than about romance between Molly and Katie...its community amd being a part of something bigger. The community feeling almost felt like the community in HP Munro's Grace Falls less the comedy but in the sense that the supporting characters are just as important. I also like how not all the drama came at one time and it wasn't overally done...it was just right for me. I recommend this book and hope there is more from this author that will interest me

Gaby LezReviewBooks says

Kathleen Halloran spent every summer of her childhood in her grandmother's house in Little Sister, an isolated island in Maine, until her younger brother died in an accident there. Twenty five years later, after her grandmother died, she decides to move back permanently. But the islanders are a tight community and her arrival stirs old memories and distrust. Among them is Molly Cooper, the attractive part-time sheriff that is less than enthusiastic about the newcomer. But as they get to know each other, their attraction grows and Molly wonders if Kathleen's past will make her bond with the island or take her away forever.

This is a very good novel by Ms. Werlinger with many different ingredients like drama, angst, humour and romance in a delicate balance. Written in third person from the point of view of both main characters Kathleen and Molly, the story unveils slowly ideal for taking all in.

Ms. Werlinger builds an interesting world in this small island. She takes her time describing how the islanders blend their Irish and native (First Ones) heritage, their mix of Paganism and Catholicism, a culture not attached to consumerism or property laws and very close to nature.

There are lots of secondary characters but Ms. Werlinger introduces them slowly and each with their own distinct personalities so it's not a burden on the reader to recognise them. There are different types such as extroverts, introverts, mystic, caring, loyal, and even quirky, like in Robin Alexander's books. There is also space for a very cute dog.

My only issue with this book is that I couldn't feel the sexual intimacy between the main characters, they feel more like life companions, lacking passion. It doesn't help that all sex scenes are fade to black. It's a minor issue because this story isn't solely a romance. Additionally, the villain characters, especially Kathleen's parents, seem a bit stereotyped and the story could have gained from getting to know them better in their suffering. Having said that, this is a very enjoyable book for those who are looking to read a life story rather than a romance.

Overall, a very good book about life in a small and tight community. 4.5 stars.

ARC provided by the author in exchange for an honest review.

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www.lezreviewbooks.com

Cristina says

It is a great story to get lost in.

Luce says

5 Stars for this Drama-Romance told through the two main characters, Kathleen & Molly.

Kathleen Halloran returns to Little Sister Island for the first time in 24 yrs. Up until she was 10, she and her older brother would spend their summers with their grandmother (Nanna). She hadn't been back since her brother tragically drowned in waters off the island.

Kathleen leaves her long-time girlfriend and estranged parents with her few possessions to escape to her Nanna's cottage. Kathleen has a lot of issues to resolve in her life and heart. She is terribly lonely and this magical island, with its close knit inhabitants just might be her cure.

There is a large number of characters in this book and Werlinger does a masterful job with each - I was never overwhelmed. Another reviewer mentioned Robin Alexander, who has quirky, eccentric side characters and so does Werlinger but they are not over the top and not played for comic relief. A favorite are the elderly unmarried sisters, Louisa & Olivia who were Nanna's best friends. I was going to describe them but it's best that you meet them and their father yourself. Oh, I can't forget Blossom! A stray dog that Kathleen rescues who became Kathleen's constant companion.

Then there is the other MC, Molly Cooper, a native, the sheriff and island handyman. She is certain that Kathleen will not stay long. This was a nice slow burn romance. It really couldn't be fast because Kathleen had a lot of growth and issues to resolve first as she slowly settles into her new home. Early on Molly's family welcomed Kathleen into their fold. I loved the passage when Kathleen goes to the Cooper's to celebrate Christmas-

// A seventh stocking was hanging from the mantel, embroidered with "Kathleen". She went to the fireplace and touched a finger to the bulging stocking. Aidan glanced up from where he was setting her bag near the tree. "It's just a stocking." Kathleen swallowed hard. "No. It isn't." //

Another interesting aspect of this book is the Island's origin story and the blending of two cultures. In the 1700s, the island's original inhabitants "The First Ones" rescued a group of shipwrecked Irish families. They intermarried and also blended their Catholic and pagan traditions and beliefs.

An excellent book that is so well written. This is a book that I will definitely re-read.

Agirlcandream says

Caren Werlinger is a master storyteller. She brings her characters to life and drops them fully formed into locations you can easily visualize and want to visit. Kathleen and Molly are the couple we are meant to root for and hope they find their HEA but Little Sister Island is filled with many others who draw you into their world and make you appreciate this return to a simpler way of life.

I loved how protective the locals are of each other and of their way of life on this tiny and somewhat magical island. Werlinger adds an element of evil which threatens the status quo and serves to bring the islanders

together. I loved the blend of faiths and customs unique to the island and preserved for centuries. Most of all I loved the growth we see in both Kathleen and Molly. Kathleen brings the burden of her past with her onto the island. It's a beautiful thing watching her spirit soar and her heart open to the possibility of love when nurtured by this warm and caring community. Molly has been surrounded by love her whole life. Her devotion to helping others while sacrificing her own needs is honourable but not fulfilling. Both carry burdens better shared with another.

This is a feel good beautiful escapist read. Time to book a cottage on some quaint little island off a coast somewhere.

Alexis says

This book had me hooked from the first page. Immediately I found myself charmed by the people living on Little Sister island. Sure they're a little quirky and have one or two odd rituals involving nudity but their overall kindness and compassion makes up for it.

As for our main characters, Kathleen was a joy to read about. I really liked the transformation she made from when she first arrived on the island as a guarded and wounded woman who ran away from her problems, to someone who learned to stand up for herself and face those same problems head on. Needless to say her character growth was impressive.

I really didn't like Molly in the beginning. Though I understood why she was not the most welcoming person when it came to Kathleen's presence on the island, it still took me a while to warm up to her. She eventually managed to finally win me over though and I was glad to see that even though she and Kathleen had their problems, they eventually managed to talk through their issues without too much unnecessary drama.

Though I did like these women as a couple I felt their chemistry lacking a little. It felt like I was missing all the heated looks that can create sexual tension. Even though the sex scenes were fade to black you can still create passion but I just didn't get that between Kathleen and Molly. Their's was definitely a more loving and tender relationship.

The book did have one or two issues that bugged me a little. The main one being Kathleen's parents. (view spoiler) They along with Kathleen's manipulating ex girlfriend really felt like mustache twirling villains.

Overall this gets a solid 4* rating.

Tinything says

[(like, avoid the problems, and just go with the flow with her parents, and she kept hang on to her ex girlfriend for 14 years until she couldnt take it anymore and moved to Little Sister island) (hide spoiler)]

Val says

Loved it

This is an awesome book. Numerous story lines and the author blends them beautifully. It has some cool, interesting cultural ceremonies that make it unique amongst romance novels. It's also nice and long. I highly recommend it.

Lisa says

If you could pick up and move to a remote island and escape your dysfunctional relationship and family, would you? It seems like a good idea to Kathleen Halloran. This is how the first chapter of *When the Stars Sang* begins - with a fresh chapter in Kathleen's life when she moves into her late grandmother's cottage on Little Sister Island, Maine.

On Little Sister, Kathleen begins a new life and a new way of living. She meets a wide array people on the island, including Molly Cooper, a woman who has made her peace with her decision to return home to Little Sister Island after college and take up a job as the local sheriff and fixit woman. The two women, Kathleen in particular, struggle with issues in their pasts, but eventually develop feelings for each other.

When a force from outside threatens the way of life on Little Sister Island, this event is also a personal blow to Kathleen. However, what is truly inspirational is the way the residents come together to deal with the issue. We also see Kathleen's own personal growth that arises from confronting what threatens her, from both within herself and from outside.

There is something about islands that captures the imagination of many people, so much so that they are the setting of many well-known literary works, films, and TV shows. Academic writings in the field of English literature trace this literary trend to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, but novels set on islands are not limited to tales of castaways and shipwreck survivors.

Little Sister Island, a tiny island with a small population far off the coast of Maine, has all the elements of an unique island setting - eccentric characters, ordinary islanders and fishermen, a local diner, rambling old cottages, windswept bluffs and a secluded beach, and a history involving shipwrecked Irish settlers who forged a new community with the aboriginal First Ones.

In some works of literature, being shipwrecked or stranded on an island is central to the plot. In other cases, it may be the island and its way of life, not a shipwrecked person, that needs to be saved. In the world today, Tuvalu and the other tiny, low-rising islands in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean that are under threat of disappearing with the rising sea levels caused by global warming come to mind in this regard. The way of life on Little Sister comes under threat for a different reason in this story and the islanders themselves, including Kathleen, come to its rescue.

Islands in literature often capture a sense of remoteness and isolation, and with this, a sense of mystique. Little Sister Island certainly has this element of remoteness, and Caren J. Werlinger is adept at building mystique and a strong sense of place. With no cell phone towers on the island, the way of life seems older, but the people are nevertheless more personally connected with each other than the people that Kathleen

leaves behind in Philadelphia. The ferry from the mainland comes infrequently for most of the year, further emphasizing Little Sister's distance from the outside world.

Perhaps other reasons that islands spark our imagination relate to the things that make them such interesting areas of research in various other academic disciplines. Islands are subjects of study with regard to questions of evolution, cultural anthropology, and ecology. Like the evolutionary aspects of islands that Darwin found, there are also cultural and anthropological features of islands as remote colonies that often leads to the development of distinct cultures, because of their separation from outsiders and because of their close communities. This is true for Little Sister which has a unique cultural blend drawn from the Irish and from the First Ones (Native Americans). In my view, the island's unique culture, as seen in the rituals and rites of passage we learn about and experience along with Kathleen, are a significant aspect of this book's richly developed setting.

John Donne's verse "No man is an island" is certainly applicable to Kathleen's journey before and after she arrives on Little Sister Island. Perhaps Kathleen nearly was a one-woman island before she arrived on Little Sister - with no good relationship with her parents or her girlfriend. Yet, even then her life was coloured by inter-connections, relationships and events, past and present. When she arrives on Little Sister, any element of self-imposed "islandness" begins to slowly wear away, as Kathleen becomes part of an interconnected, close community, their pasts and futures intertwined with hers. Thus, the theme of islands is present in both the physical setting of the novel, with its remoteness and self-contained community, but also in the sense of isolated people and interconnected relationships.

Another theme that Caren J. Werlinger weaves into the story is that of stars - and the story perfectly fits the title. As a remote place, the full sky of stars is visible on Little Sister. For millennia, people have looked to the stars, sun, and moon for navigation or to ponder philosophical questions of the nature of the universe and life itself. Esoteric or spiritual matters are elements of the culture of Little Sister, but at the same time, there are so many down-to-earth and grittier elements to the story, plot-line and characters - real people, hard work, and difficult relationships.

After a successful four-book foray into fantasy/historical novels, in this book Caren J. Werlinger returns to a contemporary setting, featuring adult characters facing romantic and personal dilemmas. Although her writing has been consistently excellent, I think writing fantasy has further strengthened Caren J. Werlinger's skill in creating unique settings, cultures, and histories. This is demonstrated in the atmosphere and life she created with Little Sister Island, and in its richly developed culture and history.

As always, her writing is clear and lucid. She incorporates both broader themes and weaves significant small details throughout the story.

One thing that makes *When the Stars Sang* a great read is that the secondary characters are somehow so much more than that! They truly make the story special. From the residents of Little Sister Island, including Molly's family, to Kathleen's family and ex-girlfriend, they range from the friendly and welcoming to the practically villainous.

Even Kathleen's dog is written with a fully formed personality, to the extent that I found myself comparing his behaviour to that of my own dog. One might even find a parallel between Kathleen's adoption of him and Kathleen being embraced by the residents and families on the island.

Among my favourite characters are Louisa and Olivia Woodhouse, two elderly, unmarried sisters who live together. They were friends of Kathleen's grandmother, and now her new neighbours, and soon befriend her.

I would like to have them as my neighbours! Olivia and Louisa are sweet and charmingly eccentric, and add a touch of humour to the story.

One element of the story that appealed to me was the introspection and level of depth that we see in both major characters, Kathleen and Molly. The novel is a romance between two women who are mature enough to know what they want, although in some respects, Kathleen in particular struggles to know herself. When moving to Little Sister Island, Kathleen cannot completely separate from and leave her old life behind. She still has ties to her ex-girlfriend that she must overcome, she still is held back by her relationship (or lack of relationship) with her parents. She still has difficult memories and must move beyond her past, especially the death of her brother on Little Sister when she was ten. We also learn about Molly's decision to remain on Little Sister and how she made peace with it.

When the Stars Sang offers subtle messages and social commentary on questions relating to immigration, cultural integration and multiculturalism. It leads readers to ponder the question of whether society should be a mixing bowl versus a melting pot, that is, a blending of cultures rather than one taking priority over others.

In the 1700s, a shipwreck left a group of poor Irish immigrants on the island, and resulted in a unique cultural blend when the Irish encountered the original, Native American inhabitants of the island, known as the First Ones. Little Sister Island of today reflects that unique melding of cultures. Rather than the Irish establishing a colonial way of life, they adapted and intermarried with the First Ones, and their descendants' culture reflects their Irish/Celtic heritage in both its Catholic and pagan elements, as well as the cultural and spiritual heritage of the First Ones. The First Ones heritage is largely reflected in the environmentalism, community landholding and culture of caring for the land, trees and nature, and sustainable living, a historically matrilineal society with respect for women, as well as a cultural history in which same-sex relationships were and continue to be respected and treated equally.

The current divisions in American society - left versus right, have versus have not - seem to have passed by Little Sister Island, perhaps because it has a more equitable way of living. However, that is not to say that life on Little Sister is perfect or utopian. Like any small town or isolated community, it takes a certain type of personality to want to live there. Many young people move away never to return. Some residents have issues with alcoholism or depression.

Another really well-developed and interesting aspect of the story is the environmental and sustainable living theme. It was very thoroughly researched and written and is woven into every aspect of life on Little Sister.

The sweet and slow-building relationship between Kathleen and Molly will satisfy readers looking for a lesbian romance with depth and resonance. It also goes beyond the initial romance stage to building a stronger relationship. However, the book will also appeal to a broader range of readers who enjoy literary fiction with strong female characters. As in much of Caren J. Werlinger's other work, the romance is part of a larger story that stands on its own.

When the Stars Sang offers a hopeful message of overcoming adversity, removing oneself from toxic relationships and family situations, and recreating a home and family of choice.

I certainly think other readers would enjoy a visit to Little Sister Island to follow Kathleen and Molly's journey. When the Stars Sang is perfect to curl up with on a starry night, and it will stay in your mind long after you finish the final page.

Lia says

The perfect read, I feel so content reading this.

Not only we got connected to the protagonists, but the other characters as well. Werlinger's books always have the depth it needed to become original and unique from others. Always new traditions I've never heard of.

Corrie says

When her nanna dies, **Kathleen (Katie) Halloran** - a woman, unloved by her parents and girlfriend – leaves her old life behind to come back to the small island of **Little Sister**. A place that holds so many happy childhood memories of summers spent with her grandmother, but also a place where her brother tragically died almost 25 years ago. Crippled with survivors guilt (fueled by an uncaring, cold mother) and an eroded feeling of self-worth (result of a 15 year relationship with a selfish partner), Kate has a tough road ahead if she wants to survive her first winter on this small rock. But she learns that the people of Little Sister (and **Molly Ahearn Cooper** in particular) are a community like no other.

Caren Werlinger has written a terrific book. I loved the island's mix of Celtic and First Ones traditions, the wonderful cast of characters and their quirky habits. It's a feel good story about slaying your inner demons and standing up for yourself, about continuity, about a small island community coming together in times of adversity and of course about love. I highly recommend!

f/f

Themes: islanders, sisters Louisa and Olivia Woodhouse are so colorful, I love that they take daddy's ashes everywhere they go, can I have a Molly of my own?

5 stars
