

Lemons in the Garden of Love: A Novel

Ames Sheldon

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The two story lines of Ames Sheldon's historical novel *Lemons in the Garden of Love* focus on important eras for women's rights.

In 1977, Cassie, who just married traditional Martin, is living in Minnesota and searching for a subject for her women's history doctoral dissertation. While researching, she discovers the artwork and diaries of Kate Reed Easton, her great grandaunt. In the early 1900s, Kate was a original founder of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts. She lived an unconventional life as a wife and artist. When Cassie is beckoned home to Massachusetts for her younger sister's wedding, she learns more about Kate from stories, diaries, and photographs—relics that belong both to her family, and that she finds while researching at Smith College.

As Cassie reads through Kate's diaries, she questions the choices she's made so far in her life, including around her fraught relationship with her mother, who favors her younger sister; her love for her husband, after she reconnects with her ex; and the disappointment of learning that she is pregnant. Later, she endures tragedies that further complicate her life.

The novel is compelling as it compares and contrasts women's social roles across time. Kate Reed Easton's diary entries are full of verve and determination, and the women's movement of the 1970s is reflected in era-specific details, though its characters are not as well realized as their older historical counterparts. Nonetheless, *Lemons in the Garden of Love* is a rich historical novel that examines the slow acknowledgement of women's rights through its lead character's family stories.

MONICA CARTER (May / June 2021)

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