

Lovereadng Reader reviews of The Ruby Slipper by Keir Alexander

Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereadng members.

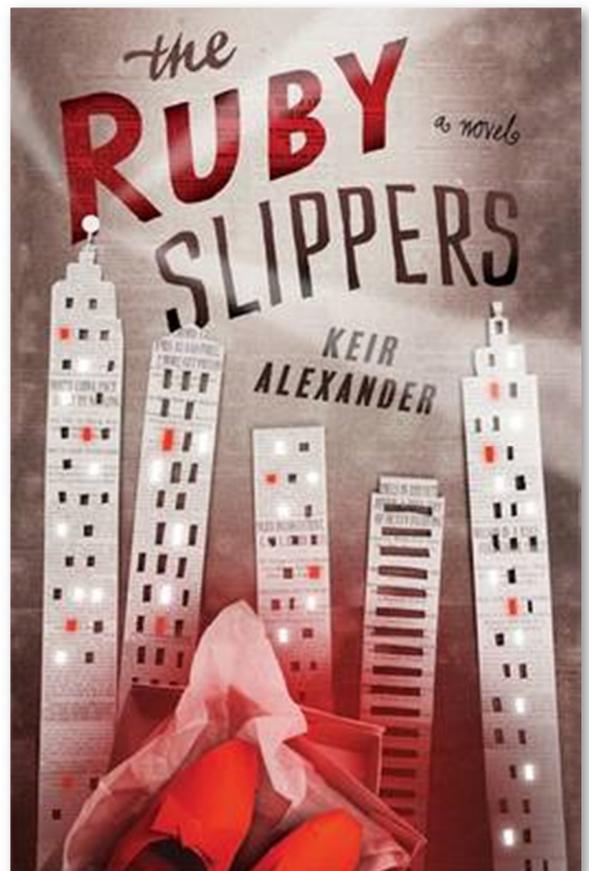
Josie Barton

This accomplished debut novel uncovers the minutiae of daily life and reveals the insatiability of greed, the sadness of family secrets and the destructive nature of overwhelming regret.

Old Rosa and her dog Barrell, meander through the St. Patrick's Day crowds, leaving behind a vile aroma of mouldering humanity. Michael Marcinkus, the effusive proprietor of the Sunrise Deli, prepares a Macchiato for James, who is a man lost in contemplation. Three world-weary youths outside a record store are bored, jaded and bordering on delinquent. Wheelchair bound, Malachi McBride takes his anger and frustration out on his nursemaid, Inez. Meanwhile, a hundred miles away on Long Island, a teenage girl leaves home in search of a dream.

On the surface these incongruent characters should have absolutely no need to interact, and yet, as the story unfolds, the lasting legacy of a pair of ruby slippers will have a profound effect on the lives of this disparate group of individuals.

I found the story remarkably easy to read and very quickly became immersed in the lives of those who feature in the story. There is a fine style to the writing with some moments of sheer brilliance, and the conjured imagery goes easily from the hustle and bustle of a small town deli, to the squalid and fetid atmosphere of a hoarder's hovel.



Overall, I found a real connection with the characters, and the need to find out just a little bit more kept me turning the pages with real enjoyment.

You can read Josie's blog at: <http://jaffareadstoo.blogspot.co.uk/>

Emily Wright

A contemporary fairy tale of coveted ruby slippers, permeated with secrets to be uncovered and cherished hopes; of good men with bad dreams and bad men with good dreams.

In New York, diverse characters attempt to lead decent lives in a city whose collective moral compass weighs heavily towards greed, disharmony and fractured relationships.

Michael Marcinkus, Latvian born and proud deli owner in New York, is shamed and embarrassed by his Aunt Rosa, who tramps the streets carrying a lifetime's burden of rubbish. It seems this old lady has never known anything happy, beautiful or glamorous.

When Rosa falls into a coma, Michael has the unenviable task of clearing her apartment. As the narrative unfolds we learn Rosa's story through bundled papers written in her stilted English; in these evocatively described snippets is echoed much of the novel's heart and soul.

In Rosa's apartment, perched high on a shelf amid squalor is a glistening golden hat box. Cocooned inside are an exquisite pair of ruby slippers, dazzling with sequins and providing a glimpse of fortunes untold for those who discover them. As the slippers' existence is made known, many New Yorkers try to lay claim to them. In the clamour to acquire their hearts' desires many of our characters will be anything but true to themselves and their heritage. However, some recognise the ruby slippers hold a worth far beyond money, these slippers can provide optimism for the future and be a lasting gift from one generation to the next...

Ruth Paterson

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long list of characters, are slowly introduced to the reader in the first few chapters. They seem to be people leading separate lives but they will eventually intertwine and in some cases meet one another. The book is full of description of the characters' lives and what they see and feel. I found it a bit slow moving at first, and didn't like or relate to any of the characters. However the mystery of the Ruby Slippers started to grip me eventually. Determined to read on, I was transported into the various settings, past and present, which began to come alive. I enjoyed delving further into the book. The characters are not all likable and the settings sometimes distasteful, but their motivations are clear and in most cases understandable. 'The Ruby Slippers' is not a cosy read, but it is a good one.

Glynis Elliott

An Intriguing Read.

The start of 'The Ruby Slippers' was intriguing bringing together various characters who were linked together by what it appears to be an old bag lady. The story then unravels to give in more depth the past of this same person showing that though we see a person on the outside the inside is so different. I knew an elderly lady who was suffering from senile dementia and who was searching for her parents who had died of course years ago. It would have been so easy to dismiss her but I was told about her past which was fascinating as she lived a life of "high society" cavorting with the likes of Sinatra etc.

Julie Wragg

Beautifully written and thought-provoking.

Rosa the bag lady has excluded herself from the world and roams New York City with her dog. It is only after a serious fall that Michael, her great nephew is able to help and in doing so delves into her filthy and cluttered apartment where he discovers a great treasure.

The ruby slippers carry the promise of "millions"; will this improve lives or corrupt? Broken families, violence, bitterness, grief and lost dreams overwhelm many of the diverse cast of characters and initially the slippers are seen by some as an opportunity to merely buy themselves out of their desperate situation with no thought for the consequences. However, through their interwoven stories, each character is offered the opportunity to grow. Michael remains constant and despite huge pressure stays true to his belief that the ruby

slippers should be kept as a symbol of beauty and hope. It is through this determination he is able to find out about his own history.

I found the book fascinating and particularly enjoyed the sections detailing Rosa's previous life.

I will definitely look out for this author in future. 'The Ruby Slipper's is beautifully written and thought-provoking, allowing the reader to reflect on what we should value most in life.

Xanthe Waite

This is a book about characters whose lives become entwined, their stories connected in unexpected twists. I found it engaging, uplifting and highly satisfying.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this book but I totally enjoyed it and was hooked and absorbed from the beginning. I'm so glad that I had the opportunity to read it.

This is a book about people. We are introduced to a range of characters of different ages and backgrounds whose lives are interwoven sometimes majorly and sometimes in a minimal way. They have real depth from Rosa the stinky old bag lady and her mutt Barrell, to Harrison a young man finding satisfaction in getting high, to James watching his lover die in a hospital. You feel like you can recognise and understand these people, they are richly drawn.

The characters' lives become more entwined and their stories connected in unexpected twists. There are some moments that shock, some are creepy, some tender and poignant. You find yourself drawn in and rooting for certain characters, whilst all the time questioning the motives of others. You wish you could interfere - issue warnings, give help but you are a passenger in this tale and I was curious to see what would happen.

The Ruby Slippers of the title are a pair of Judy Garland's famous red shoes from the Wizard of Oz. They are found and become central to the story. There is some background about the film and it's era but you don't need to be a fan to be interested. The interest is in the motives and ideals of the different characters as they become drawn to the Ruby Slippers.

I really enjoyed the journey of this book.

The final two chapters draw everything together beautifully and you end the story feeling both satisfied and uplifted. I would recommend this book. It's

unusual and involving.

You can read Xanthe's blog at: <http://xanthewaite3.booklikes.com/>

Sarah Harper

This is a very cleverly written and magical debut novel. It is a truly absorbing read and I would highly recommend it.

I absolutely loved Keir Alexander's debut novel, 'The Ruby Slippers'. This story has a truly magical feel to it, drawing the reader in effortlessly. The fine, gossamer threads of each of the characters' lives are delicately interwoven. The strands pull together and the bonds between the characters strengthen as the story develops yet they also remain fragile enough to be torn apart.

The story moves easily between characters and I felt as if I really got to know each of them and their hopes and dreams which is a testament to the skill of the author. The characters are all very disparate but each is developed fully and this results in them being extremely believable and very 'human'. Michael, with his bleak history and family who close ranks against him, Harrison, his problems with drugs and aggression which are at odds to his attraction to the church-going girl he loves, James who is merely trying to make it through each day following the painful loss of his lover, Siobhan, a young girl searching for her father, McBride, a bitter old man spitting venom at all he encounters, Inez, his good Catholic nurse, Old Rosa, the bag lady who ties them all together and one other character, who comes into her own in the final chapters and, in doing so, allows everything to fall into place.

In books such as this, with multiple storylines, I often feel drawn to a favourite character, usually one which has been made more rounded and real than the others, however this didn't apply to 'The Ruby Slippers' as all the characters and storylines exist in perfect balance with each other. It is a very cleverly written debut novel and a truly absorbing read. I would highly recommend it.

JB JOHNSTON

How can a pair of Ruby Slippers can change the lives of so many people? If you are a fan of 'The Wizard of Oz' you too will understand their magic.

'The Ruby Slippers' is the type of book I absolutely love. It's a story where all the characters end up connected in some way or another and each individual story

is told, concluding with some connection to another character. Michael is a grocer who is almost nearing retirement age. His aunt Rosa is a social pariah who is seen as the smelly old bag lady, which is exactly how she looks. However, an accident soon reveals Aunt Rosa's secrets; in particular a pair of ruby slippers.

The book takes us on a journey of exploration in relation to the slippers and we discover their amazing history. Michael himself is taken on a journey of self-discovery finding out more about Aunt Rosa than he could ever have imagined and struggling with the trauma of his childhood during the war.

Soon the slippers become prominent in the lives of James, who has just lost his partner Paulo and Harrison who desires the ruby slippers in a very dangerous way. The Ruby Slippers shape the lives of many characters in the book, taking them on a roller coaster of emotions and difficult decisions to make.

This book was very enjoyable and extremely well written. Sad and poignant at times, the story also offers hope and a promise of a better life. The story doesn't speed along but takes the reader on a gentle saunter through the lives of many interesting characters, each flawed but all likeable and interesting. Highly recommend.

You can read Debbie's blog at: www.brookcottagebooks.blogspot.com

Anita Wallas

All human life is here in a story which challenges differing values.

Love, loss, greed and redemption are just a few of the themes explored by Keir Alexander in this stunning debut. I was hooked from the start and it's one of those rare books which becomes an imprinted experience that plays over. I absolutely loved it! The slippers of the title are Judy Garland's from 'The Wizard of Oz'. They are the focal point for a modern parable where each character struggles to find true value in their life.

It's a gripping multi themed story. I was grabbed by a narrative which moves the story forward skilfully in small bites. There's a finely drawn cast of characters each with a tale to tell as their lives and paths weave across a New York backdrop. The disparate threads are carefully drawn together as the central characters start to learn what matters. From the laconic, streetwise youth who lives with his god fearing aunt to immigrant refugees seeking a new life, each voice is distinct and different. An eclectic microcosm drawn by temptation and opportunity.

*There are moments of genuine pathos and true happiness and it's filled with insight into souls motivated by greed. The underlying story about the acquisition of the slippers and their stark juxtaposition to Rosa, the bag lady's life is a tantalising reveal which swept me along and ultimately took me by surprise as the plot unfolded. **This book's a literary gem.***

Kathy Howell

This is an interesting read dealing with greed and how an amazing discovery affects lots of different people.

This is a difficult book to get in to but it soon sweeps the reader along. The characters are well written and the reader really cares what happens to them. At the beginning of the book the characters seem unconnected but by the end all the characters are connected to each other in some way.

The book is about the discovery of a pair of ruby slippers worn by Judy Garland in the film 'The Wizard of Oz'. When Michael's Aunt is knocked over in the street and is taken to hospital he decides that the flat needs to be cleared as it is unlikely that his Aunt will return. He spends hours clearing the rubbish she has collected and then finds the slippers as well as a letter about her life.

The slippers bring dispute and anger within Michael's family which leaves him isolated. They also bring danger and threats from an ex-employee, Harrison. The slippers also come to the attention of a customer, James, who has no personal financial interest in the slippers but is looking for a way to remember his partner, Paolo.

However, if they find happiness will be a direct result of their connection with the slippers.

Karen Cocking

"She stinks. It has to be said. Stinks to high heaven". This is our introduction to Rosa, the old bag lady who walks the streets with her dog Barrell, who stays with her when no human will. Her nephew and only relative, Michael Marcinkus is called to her hospital bed after she is involved in an accident during the Parade. When he and his wife Grace go to her apartment they are disgusted by the squalor and filth that she lives in. Nothing has ever been thrown away, not even rotten food. However in amongst the filth and stench they find a box containing a pair of ruby slippers. Gradually we are told of Rosa's story and how she acquired such beautiful items.

We meet a cast of characters who appear to be completely random – a troublesome teenage boy, a 14 year old girl who feels abandoned by her father, a rich, sick and bitter old man raging against life and a man keeping a vigil at his dying lover's hospital bedside. All have their own voices and their own part to play in the story of Rosa's slippers.

This is an extremely well written debut novel but I have to admit to feeling disappointment that it didn't quite live up to its promise. For me, there was a lack of engagement or connection with the characters and at times I felt it was over-written. The story travels from Latvia from the start of WWI to America with the tragedy of war movingly portrayed. I would have liked to have known more about Rosa's history and I felt that she wasn't given the prominence in the story that she deserved.

Greed, loss, family secrets and regrets are just some of the facets of this story. There were many parts of the book that I enjoyed however sadly it won't be a memorable read for me.

You can read Karen's blog at: <http://myreading-corner.blogspot.co.uk/>

And follow her on twitter: karendennise

Rebecca Whymark

*A good easy read. The characters are developed and described well throughout the book. I feel it detracts from a book when an author feels the need to have swearing included but that is just my opinion. For saying this is the first novel from Kier Alexander, **I thought it was very good. Not a book I would have picked but I was pleasantly surprised.***

Angela Rhodes

I loved this book, it grabbed and whisked me away like Dorothy down the Yellow Brick Road. *It's an amazing debut novel by Keir Alexander full of family secrets, heartbreak, lost treasures, and of course The Ruby Slippers.*

Rosa Olga Petraidis, is a bag lady with a secret, she has family that really, just tolerate her. Rosa lives alone apart from her little dog, Barrell for company... and Rosa has a secret, a secret that is going to tug at your heart strings and of course the Ruby Slippers that bring together the most colourful cast of characters into your world. This is an amazing, wonderful debut novel by Keir

Alexander, one I will reread.

Rachel Hall

This novel is very different to the usual books I read but I was thoroughly entertained and enthralled by this unexpectedly beautiful story. This book is primarily a search for meaning and what is important in the lives of a varied cast of New Yorkers. With multiple characters all connected somehow to the central figure of Michael, the Latvian immigrant grocer, and hence, in turn, to the ruby slippers, the novel is a delightfully pleasant, yet unrealistic, tale. This, however, does not make it any less enjoyable.

The story revolves around Michael Marcinkus, the nephew of the reclusive old bag lady, Rosa. An accident on the day of the St Patricks' Day Parade brings Rosa closer to Michael's own life. With Michael being her only remaining relative, it is his reason for looking into her affairs.

A clearing of her flat leads Michael to find a treasured piece of history, in the form of a pair of ruby slippers used in the filming of a famous Hollywood movie. These slippers come to take on meaning for Michael and his family and, in turn, for two individuals who play a part in Michael's life - a customer who has recently lost his partner and a boy from the wrong side of town who had worked for him and let him down.

The importance of these slippers is revealed evermore so as Michael finds out more and more about Rosa, and hence his own, family's history in war torn Latvia. For very different reasons, the slippers come to have meaning to the other two individuals, and both have very different ideas of how acquiring these may enhance their lives.

*Whilst the interlinking characters hold your attention, the most moving element of the storyline revolves around Michael and his terrible childhood and it is his journey of discovery that I found to be the part that is most engaging of all. **This is a thoroughly feel good read with the key elements being the dreams and hopes for the future of the very different individuals involved.***

Beth Townsend

As a huge fan of Dorothy and 'The Wizard of Oz' I went into this novel expecting to love it and I wasn't disappointed. It truly is mesmerising. Each of the characters' narratives is rich and packed full of secrets, quirks and emotion

making each character as enjoyable as the last.

Though Rosa is hardly present throughout the novel as an active character she is by far my favourite, her letters and journals bring alive a time which must have been so exciting – Hollywood during the shooting of ‘The Wizard of Oz’. It’s the stuff of dreams.

*Each character has their own trials to overcome, some more than a single issue and it’s impossible not to get drawn into their personal stories and want to find out more about them. **Alexander clearly has a talent for creating compelling characters. As magical as the title suggests, ‘The Ruby Slippers’ is simply wonderful.***

Karen Clark

Alexander cleverly builds up a web of connections between disparate characters from different backgrounds through the medium of the ruby slippers.

I could not put this book down and wanted to keep on reading to find out what happens to each character. The storyline builds up gradually as each character is introduced, seemingly unconnected, from different walks of life, their lives touching one another at first briefly and gradually becoming more intertwined through the ruby slippers. Ordinary everyday activities and worries are combined with major traumatic events in the characters' lives but the resilience of human nature wins through. I particularly liked the insightful comments on life such as “by closing time they will all be on their knees, not so much undone by honest toil but by the daily infections of other people's pain”. You find yourself drawn into each person's life, hating some, pitying others and sympathising with others.

Amrita Dasgupta

Rosa, the pariah with a pair of ruby slippers, touches the lives of a motley collection of individuals, giving them hope for a better tomorrow.

How can a smelly old bag lady change your life? That is exactly what the characters in this social drama thought about their unkempt acquaintance, Rosa. But things changed after an accident when a pair of Ruby slippers were

found in her possession.

Not unlike Cinderella's glass shoe and Dorothy's magic shoes, the shoe metaphor has a pivotal role to play in this urban fairy tale. The Ruby slippers entranced everybody and drew out the good, bad and ugly in everyone. It enticed, teased and gave them new hopes and desperate dreams.

Michael the Grocer goes on a journey of self-exploration, where he learns more about his life and his Aunt Rosa's. Despite the odds and pressure, unlike some others, he remains resolute that the ruby slippers is a sign of beauty and hope in their lives and not a sudden windfall.

Keir Alexander's debut novel has shown mastery over plot and character building. Creating many multi-dimensional characters in a compelling and convoluted story is no mean feat. Although I found the novel well-paced, it might appear slow to some. But I believe the plot and the buildup needed the gentle walk-in-the-park treatment quite unlike the mad rush of New York City.

You can read Amrita's blog at: [www. thebookdrifter.wordpress.com](http://www.thebookdrifter.wordpress.com)

Sara Fanner

*Old Rosa is an emotionally disturbed woman, wandering the streets of New York, apparently disconnected from any sort of family. **Following her involvement in an accident, a pair of Ruby slippers are found in Rosa's neglected apartment. How did these shiny pieces of Technicolor History end up in Rosa's dingy forsaken home?***

Alexander weaves his tale around a group of characters in modern New York City. An investigation of family history, Alexander's narrative is rich in description and warmth. The story also spotlights loneliness; the loneliness that can be felt within a family and the loneliness of those without family. Alexander builds his story around an inherently disparate group of people and skilfully brings their histories together. Satisfyingly unusual in a modern book of fiction, the protagonist's search for redemption is sympathetically and kindly handled.

Skipping from deprived war torn Europe to New York's bustling streets, to lush cinematic stage sets, there is so much to like about this novel. Whether it's Alexander's wry sideways jabs at the banalities of polite conversation or his delving into the deeper sadness's which humanity tries to hide, I wanted to read more and more.

'The Ruby Slippers' is a glittering debut novel indeed.

Dorothy Calderwood

From just the first few lines I knew this was going to be one of those stories that would stay with me for some time. The vibrancy of New York shines through from the beginning and the reader quickly becomes involved in the lives of each of the main characters: old Rosa, once beautiful and sparkling, now unkempt and oblivious to all around her; the grocer – and Rosa's nephew – Michael Marcinkus; Michael's wife, the impatient Grace; the delinquent Harrison; the teenaged Siobhan and her mother, Corinne; James and his critically ill partner, Paolo. Their lives – and how they interconnect – soon begin to matter to the reader, and the book becomes hard to put down.

Visiting Rosa's apartment after she is involved in an accident which leaves her in a coma, Michael is astounded to come across what can only be described as two pieces of Hollywood history. But how did they end up with Rosa, and what will be their fate?

Even in the Big Apple, where many are able to remain anonymous, these prized possessions cannot remain a secret for long. Could they perform miracles and transform seemingly non-eventful lives? Who will be the victor in the race for ownership? Most of all, will anyone stop to think about the lady who once owned them, and her history?

This is a story in which relationships are tested and values challenged. It is about the search for meaning and for what is important in life. Read it and remember it.

Barbara Gaskell

In the same way that ruby slippers suggests an ordinary item transformed into something beautiful this was my sense of getting past the apparent squalor that Rosa lived in to the rich stories that lay behind – a classic case of don't judge a book by its cover.

Rosa is a bag lady with a home where nothing appears ever to have been thrown with the consequence of inevitable filth. However in amongst this junk and filth is found a pair of ruby slippers. From here the tale travels from New York to Hollywood, Germany to Latvia pulling together a seemingly disparate set of characters and stories.

The book was well written, sauntering gently through the lives of the characters, allowing time to get to know their flaws and their qualities. If I have one criticism it is that the strands and links are drawn

together a bit too neatly for me. I will certainly give Keir's next book a try.

Kathy Martin

*'The Ruby Slippers' - **What a truly remarkable book. This is a stunning debut novel.** At first I thought the number of characters was going to be too much. I did think "where is this going?" I did wonder if it was going to be a collection of short stories. A couple of chapters in and I was completely hooked! **I found myself thinking about it during the day and really looking forward to getting back to 'see what happened next'.** The characters are so brilliantly portrayed - I felt that I would recognise any one of them. Next time I make a trip to New York I'm sure I'll be looking out for them.*