

Publishers Weekly 11/17/2008

The Rose Variations Marisha Chamberlain. Soho, \$24 paper (352p) ISBN 978-1-56947-538-6

In her first novel, poet and playwright Chamberlain tells the vibrant story of Rose McGregor, a talented composer navigating academia in the early days of feminism. A temporary appointment as the token "Girl Composer" at a Minnesota college puts 25-year-old Rose on her own for the first time; the older of two New Hampshire sisters, Rose has always been the plain, responsible one, caretaker to sister Natalie, but finds her professional and personal lives blooming in the cold weather of St. Paul. She falls in love with Guy, a stonemason who wants to whisk her off to his farm, but the affair falls apart. From there, Rose joins eccentric cellist Lila Goldensohn, who has turned her country home into an all-female retreat. Living off the land without the distraction of love, Rose returns to composing until Natalie unexpectedly arrives, pregnant and in distress, to overtake Rose's life again. Following Rose's music career to the city, the West Coast and back again, Chamberlain makes a charming, quirky fugue of Rose's pursuit of love, independence and success. (*Feb.*)