



# A Woman in Sardinia

VALERIA USALA



## About the author

Valeria Usala was born in Cagliari, Sardinia, in 1993. After a degree in Languages and Communication, she studied filmmaking in Rome and then moved to Turin to study writing at the Holden School. *A Woman in Sardinia* is her first novel. She lives in Cagliari.

## About the book

A story of three generations of women, their courage and search for independence in the face of superstition and prejudice, in the spirit of Natalia Ginzburg and Elena Ferrante. In this striking debut, based on a true story, Valeria Usala bears witness to an age-old story of violence against women and takes us into the heart of rural Sardinia, where superstitions and cruelty coexist with the joys and companionship of a tight-knit community.

Teresa runs a shop and a tavern. But not even the family she has created with the man she loves can protect her from the malicious gossip of jealous locals, who are threatened by her independence. Her own mother, Maria, was made an outcast, and now Teresa is in turn forsaken by the villagers. Will she pay for her success with her life? Is she like a character in Greek tragedy, whose destiny is inevitable? Valeria Usala gives voice to the forgotten women of Sardinia—and to the courage of women everywhere.

## Discussion questions

1. 'We are as stubborn as the *maestrale* wind, as limpid as the sea; we wear black shawls that herald misfortunes.' How does sadness and grief shape the lives of the women of Lolai?
2. When we meet Teresa, she is dressed up and leaving the house shortly after the birth of her third child—her 'umpteenth arrogant act of brazenness' (p5). What do these opening scenes tell us about the villagers?
3. 'They'd renamed [Maria] *la bruja*, a common moniker for women who were old, mad and witchy' (p27). How does the role of the 'village witch' reinforce traditional expectations of women in this community?
4. Discuss the differences between the way men and women interact with Teresa.
5. '[The villagers] are the problem. They've forced her into a pointless war ever since she was born' (p111). Do you think Bruno's assessment is correct?
6. How does the entry of the tree cutters Carlo and Tommaso change the dynamic in Lolai?
7. 'Better alone and whole than in pieces with men.' (p142) Why do you think Gavina's statement might be controversial in the village?
8. Do you think Teresa's death was the inevitable result of her neighbours' attitudes? Why or why not?
9. Discuss the title of the novel.