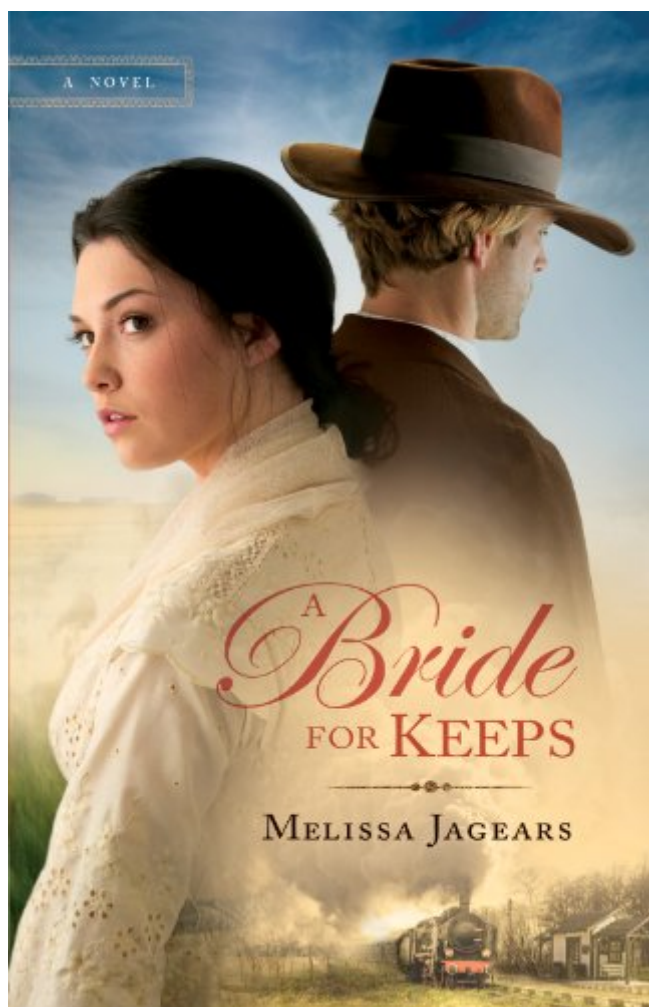


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A Bride For Keeps (Unexpected Brides Book #1): A Novel



Synopsis

A Tender Tale of Love on the Prairie Perfect for CBA Readers Although Everett Cline can hardly keep up with the demands of his homestead, he won't humiliate himself by looking for a helpmate ever again--not after being jilted by three mail-order brides. When a well-meaning neighbor goes behind his back to bring yet another mail-order bride to town, he has good reason to doubt it will work, especially after getting a glimpse at the woman in question. She's the prettiest woman he's ever seen, and it's just not possible she's there to marry a simple homesteader like him. Julia Lockwood has never been anything more than a pretty pawn for her father or a business acquisition for her former fiance. Having finally worked up the courage to leave her life in Massachusetts, she's determined to find a place where people will value her for more than her looks. Having run out of all other options, Julia resorts to a mail-order marriage in far-away Kansas. Everett is skeptical a cultured woman like Julia could be happy in a life on the plains, while Julia, deeply wounded by a past relationship, is skittish at the idea of marriage at all. When, despite their hesitations, they agree to a marriage in name only, neither one is prepared for the feelings that soon arise to complicate their arrangement. Can two people accustomed to keeping their distance let the barricades around their hearts down long enough to fall in love?

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Customer Reviews

I am so conflicted about this book. On one hand I really liked the majority of the characters. Mostly. Julia and Everett are both so damaged emotionally - the words expressing their pain and fear are gorgeous and touching, truly showing the reader how conflicted they both are. The secondary characters - meddling Rachel and faithful Dex, along with their brood - are highly entertaining and almost steal the show. They all come together to showcase a beautiful family unit without needing a blood relationship, which is wonderful to read. On the other hand, Julia and Everett irritated me to no end. At 54% through the book I noted how repetitive their thoughts and actions were - I'm not good enough, I don't deserve this gift, I'm damaged and unforgivable, I'm going to hide my emotions away so as not to get hurt. The avoiding going on between these two was practically a full-time job. By 75% I was close to putting it down and walking away. When I reached the 91% point I feared for the safety of my Nook as I was ready to throw the thing across the room. And yet... The story itself was warm and filled with beautiful moments of faith and friendship. The world building was relatively accurate (though I am no historian) without dumping a bunch of information on the reader. Something about the words Melissa wrote made me want to keep reading even when her characters made me so frustrated and upset. There was a flow to them, a warmth that softened all of the extra drama. They kept me tied to this story all the way through the end. Finally, the moments of faith and scripture were uplifting and a good reminder without crossing the line into "preachy" and fit the story perfectly. In the end, I gave this one three stars.

By the time I won this book, I'd forgotten I ever entered a request for it. By the time it came in the mail, I'd given up hope of it coming and was about to mark it as lost in the mail on the LibraryThing website. By the time I finished the book, I knew I'd never forget it again. The first chapter is slow, full of telling rather than showing. The first couple of chapters - and a few spots throughout the book - give backstory in an awkward info-dump fashion. There's a few sentences that just rub me the wrong way as a writer, and way too many 'ands' and 'buts,' especially at the beginning of sentences, made it past initial editing. (My copy was an ARC, so that will probably be fixed before publication.) My lovely readers, you know that for me to still race through such a book in one weekend must mean the story was a killer. You'd be so very right. I don't know if I've ever shared my favorite book with you. While I have certain favorite authors and series, my favorite standalone novel is very different from those. It's called A Family Forever, by Brenda Coulter, and while most

people have never heard of it, I've read it no fewer than five times. Basically, it's a contemporary marriage-of-convenience story. In *A Bride for Keeps*, a very similar story (but in an 1800s Kansas prairie) plays out. Why this storyline draws me in every time is beyond me. All I know is, I just couldn't put this book down. The characters are so heartfelt, so amazing. My entire reading experience was empathy for hurting Julia, sympathy for hardened Everett, and full-blown adoring for meddling Rachel (who is totally awesome and deserves her own book if you ask me).

This is a difficult book for me to review because it left me with many mixed emotions. Everett Cline is a nice-looking, God-fearing homesteader who has been quite unlucky in the love department. Sending for multiple mail order brides, one at a time of course, they all chose someone else to spend their life with. He feels he must be greatly lacking and has given up the idea of marriage and a helpmate. His very good friend and neighbor, Rachel, secretly answers a mail order bride ad as herself but on Everett's behalf and after corresponding with the young lady for many months, invites her to travel to Kansas to meet/marry Everett. Everett finds out about the deception only minutes before the train arrives. He is not at all thrilled by this turn of events but he will do the right thing if the lady wants him for a husband. Julia has her own set of marriage rules which are: marry only for companionship, never fall in love, and most specifically...never enter the marriage bed...a real hands off policy, and no children. Her past has left her emotionally and physically wounded and she will not share her secrets with anyone. This book was so repetitive that I quickly became frustrated, annoyed, bored, and considered not finishing it but I trudged on. It dragged in many places and, I feel, was way too long for the outcome of the book. It could have all been said and done in 200 pages instead of dragging it out. The storyline was weak and without depth, lacking a subplot which could have made the story much more interesting. Both the H and h were insipid characters with the heroine being weak, self-centered, emotionally unavailable, narrow minded and shallow.

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