



Brides of Eden: A True Story Imagined

Linda Crew

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In our defense, I can say only that nothing seemed so terribly strange in the beginning...

When, in 1903, the fiery preacher Joshua arrives in sleepy Corvallis, Oregon, Eva Mae -- and the whole town -- is never the same again.

Joshua is wonderful. He's charismatic. Insisting on simplicity, he commands his converts to burn their possessions. Demanding devotion to Christ, he tells them to abandon their personal ties.

But there's a surge of violence rising, and before it's over, families will be ripped apart and lives will be destroyed. Eva Mae's gripping true story is a stranger-than-fiction tale of a turn-of-the-century apocalyptic cult.

Brides of Eden: A True Story Imagined Details

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From Reader Review *Brides of Eden: A True Story Imagined* for online ebook

Jori Richardson says

In 1903 Corvallis, Oregon, a group consisting primarily of young women were drawn into a twisted cult by a handsome young man who claimed to be the Second Christ. In the beginning, everything seemed perfectly ordinary, and no one noticed when things began to gradually slip into chaos.

The account, though fictional, of a true story was both horrifying and fascinating to read about. As things progress, the events become darker, more extreme, and more tragic.

I couldn't put this book down, and I devoured it in only about 45 minutes. It was certainly a page-turner, and the fact that it isn't all that taxing of a read helped.

However, while the story and meaning behind this book are memorable and interesting, everything else was left at mediocre quality.

The characters were never fully developed, written to be mostly shallow sketches. I found the best character to be Mr. Hurt, the main character's father, even though he was not featured extensively. His story of losing everything was a heartbreaking one, and the way that he unconditionally loves his family after everything they put him through was touching and sad.

The false prophet, the evil and mysterious Joshua, was a disappointment. What was his story? Why would he go to such lengths to invent this cult, and where did he get the idea? I kept wanting to really feel the power of that gaze Eva always spoke about, to be charmed by him like the characters were, to be heartbroken when I learned of his betrayal. Instead, he is simply left at being bad, and there is little background, leaving him as a rather weak villain, unfortunately.

The main character, Eva, never got through to me. Her feelings are muffled, mentioned only fleetingly and in simple wording.

This book is classified as YA - but I wish that the author would have had the courage to write it as it should have been. YA or not, this is a mature subject that deserves mature writing. Rape, suicide, murder, starvation, and a twisted cult all play a part here, and yet they are watered down as much as possible. After her assault, Eva is confused, but far from traumatized, and it is barely brought up again.

If you have some imagination, and can picture what such events and circumstances must have really been like for these people, it really fills in a lot of the story, and it certainly did for me.

This book is a good attempt, even if not an entirely successful one. Nevertheless, worth reading.

Mara says

A thoroughly fascinating story, made only more so by the fact that it is true. It also struck my particular fancy because I have actually visited many of the towns mentioned within, and I had no idea that such an incredible, thoroughly creepy incident happened in Corvallis and around Yahats and other neighboring towns. And Linda Crew is an author whose research can generally be trusted.

What was probably most disturbing about Brides of Eden was that there are still people - Christians included - who allow crazy individuals like Joshua move their emotions into a frenzy, making all logical thought almost impossible. Such events are not just confined to the spiritualism of the 1800s.

There is very little content to be addressed. There is one bedroom scene, when Joshua informs the women that one of them will give birth to the Second Christ, and he requests to see each woman alone in his private shelter. It is necessary to events, and the Author handles the scene with kind delicacy. Also, there are two g-damns, and other references to Joshua having affairs with married women. But nothing explicit.

Brides of Eden is a book which will disturb Readers because it is a true story, but it is really interesting and is a highly recommended historical-fiction read.

Melissa says

I couldn't put this book down--in fact, I kept flipping ahead trying to guess how it all ended.

A fascinating man comes to a small town, starts a church, and a group of women throw almost everything away to follow him.

Fascinating story, though the writing was sometimes a bit lacking. It's told through the eyes of one of the younger members of the group--who does eventually leave, but part of me wanted to know more about Joshua's motivations. Did he really believe he was a prophet? Or was he always scamming them?

Worth reading, and it would be a great choice for a book club.

Dana says

This book was a little boring. I think that may have been due to the author trying to stay within the bounds of history. It was not developed very well and the characters infatuation with Joshua seemed forced rather than like a natural progression of the cult mindset. I think that by trying to stick to the solid facts the author failed to develop the narrator enough for the reader to understand why she went along with the craziness.

Hannah says

In the early 1900's, Franz Creffield comes to the sleepy town of Corvallis. He is good looking, charismatic, and full of religious fervor. Soon he has the women of the town entranced and they start a cult - the "Brides of Christ" and they begin to prepare for the end of the world. He changes his name to Joshua and tells the women that one of them is to be the second Mary.

The book is based on a true event, reimagined from the perspective of one of the women. The story talks about how they got entranced and how the fathers and brothers kept taking the women away and they would sneak back.

It's a story for younger audiences and so the writing is simple and some of the facts are repeated a few too many times, but it was still a good story and I liked it.

Sharon says

I love historical fiction and am always intrigued by religious cults. That said, the subtitle of the book is "A true story imagined" and I feel much of this particular story is, in fact, imagined. While many facts are verifiable (mostly those relating to dates and places) the story is told from the perspective of Eva Mae Hurt, a young girl who gets caught up with the Brides of Christ church, and is entirely fabricated. Unfortunately, while the story is interesting and held my attention, none of the accounts credited to Eva Mae are truly hers. Even her personality and the way she might interact with other major characters is not on record anywhere except in the imagined reality of the book. As a result, the characters' voices aren't very strong and do not feel like true people, but rather two-dimensional, half-fleshed-out characterizations.

Alyssa says

I was looking forward to reading this book. The storyline sounded enthralling, and the cover art draws you in; but I was disappointed when I got the book. The whole thing moves too quickly, and the author's writing is very repetitive. The main character seemed very empty, and didn't have a very deep mindset or anything. It was meh, overall. The topic was interesting but I wouldn't recommend it to anyone.

Auggie says

This book was a trip. I picked it up at a local library sale for \$2 and was actually really compelled to read it. The concept of religious cults is interesting, albeit often disturbing, and the fact that this story was based on TRUE happenings just clenched it for me.

I couldn't put it down once I'd opened it up. I started it and read it it well into the night until I was done. Now, it wasn't that long, barely over 250 pages but I kept finding myself rereading passages completely blown away by what was going on. Occasionally I would get on my computer and look up information regarding the happenings in this book to read the accounts of what really happened.

Linda Crew connects the reader to these women who suffered under the hand of a charming and charismatic man that truly must have been out of his mind. However, he was a clever criminal and regardless of what his motives were he was atrocious and the women who were caught in his web truly could not withdraw themselves from him no matter how hard they tried.

Asylums, Strychnine poisoning, abuse, starvation, trials, and the tribulations of all of these women (and men) who were traumatized by these events keeps the reader tense.

This book is sure to wrench your heart strings and cause you to feel a plethora of emotions from disgust, to pity, to joy, then dismay, and then right back to disgust.

The ending of these women's stories are both heartbreaking and victorious and I recommend this book to anyone who is looking to see into the hearts (though perhaps imagined) of the women who suffered under the crazed ideals of "Joshua".

Jara says

Based on a true event, this is the sad story of women in small Oregon town in 1903 who are mesmerized by a self proclaimed prophet who led them away from everything they had ever known and cherished into a life of deprivation, sacrifice, and solitude. I could never understand the attraction of contemporary cults and why people would follow these charismatic leaders. This book helped my see how vulnerable people can be led astray by a powerful speaker. These individuals begin with connections to average folks, sharing their religion and then, bit by bit, lead them to extreme views and lifestyles. Unfortunately, some women lose their lives in their quest to personify religious perfection.

Melissa McClintock says

A quirky little story that takes place in Corvallis Oregon, about 3 hours from where I live. She does a good job of "retelling" what occurred. She had to construct the characters, but how a "pastor" seduced these women and made them "his flock" so much they left their husband's and would do whatever he wanted.

Not everyone's cup of tea, unless you like quirky historical stories and it is a fun and easy read.

Sarah says

this was an interesting book, but not particularly gripping. For a book with a little over 200 pages, it took me a rather long time to read because once I put it down I wasn't particularly motivated to pick it back up. I pretty much read it 20 pages at a time when I was waiting for other things to happen (water to boil for making dinner, dryer to finish, etc).

Not a compelling book, but I guess it was interesting enough.

Tracie says

A charismatic preacher stirs up the town's womenfolk and convinces them he has heard from God. Gradually he takes over their lives asking each to give up their worldly goods, ways, and ideas and they gladly do so. Finally he reveals that one of them will be chosen as a mother for God's new child. Based on a true story, (though all details are imagined) this is the story about how confusion, a strong personality and group dynamics can influence a person.

Virginia Walter says

In 1903 a charismatic young man seduces a number of women in Corvallis, Oregon, with his tales of a coming End Time and his own sexual magnetism. They leave their families to become obedient converts to

his Bride of Christ Church. The story, based on a true incident, is told from the point of view of one of these women whose sister and mother are also in thrall to this self-proclaimed prophet who calls himself Joshua. She eventually returns to her forgiving father and ends up living a long and happy life as the wife of a Swedish farmer. Others are not so lucky.

Aj Sterkel says

I know a little about the Brides of Christ, so when I heard there was a fictionalization of their story, I knew I had to get my hands on it.

In 1903, a preacher who calls himself Joshua moves to Corvallis, Oregon and sets up a new church. At first, everything goes well, but when Joshua's preaching strays too far from what's in the Bible, the men in Corvallis chase him into the wilderness. But, he doesn't go alone. A few women from his congregation go with him. After that, things get weird.

This is a hard book to review because it's based on a true story, and the author is working within the confines of history. **The book is short, fast-paced, and written for a young adult audience, so I was able to finish it in a few hours. The story hooked me immediately. I couldn't put it down,** even though I already knew the basics of the plot.

The story takes place over several years and is narrated by Eva, the youngest of the women who refuse to give up on Joshua. Eva is confused because everyone in her life is telling her something different. Her mother, brother, and sister love Joshua; her father hates him; some of her friends disown her for following him; and others encourage her not to give up on him because he's trying to help people. It's easy for the reader to understand Eva's confusion and feel bad for her. Everyone in her life is pressuring her to do something different.

The most interesting part of this book is that it shows the culture of rural Oregon in 1903. Back then, religious freedom and women's rights weren't really things. When Joshua's church becomes a public nuisance, the police look the other way while the townspeople try to murder Joshua and harass his congregation. Men have no trouble getting their wives and daughters sent to mental institutions for refusing to abandon their religion. And, when Eva is raped, she becomes a "ruined" woman. Very few people care about her body or mind, but everybody cares about her virginity and marriage potential. I guess 1903 was a terrible time to be a woman with a non-mainstream religion.

Eva's father is a product of his time, but I still have a lot of respect for him. He knows that Joshua is dangerous, and he refuses to lose his family to the preacher's abuse. Even though Eva argues, and runs away, and behaves like a teenage tyrant, her father refuses to let Joshua have her. He loves Eva, even when she makes really bad decisions.

I wish the characters had been better developed. I know they're real people, and we probably don't have many details about their lives, but they didn't have much personality. Some of the characters' actions also felt forced to me. The author tries very hard to help the reader understand why these women follow Joshua into the woods, but since Joshua's character is underdeveloped, I didn't see the appeal of him. If I had seen more of his personality, maybe the characters' choices would have been easier to accept.

Also, I don't usually say this, but **the plot moves too fast** for me. This is a very short book that covers

several huge moments in Eva's life. It probably moves quickly because we don't know much about the real Eva's life, but I wish the story had been slower and more detailed.

Despite a few issues, I really liked *Brides of Eden*. This is one of those stories that need to be told. ***Brides of Eden* might be a perfect book for anyone who wants to read a fast-paced story that's stranger than fiction.**

Liz Chapman says

Three cheers for historical fiction!

Cults are scary. Based on true events and characters that formed the "Holy Rollers" cult in Corvallis, Oregon at the turn of the century, this story is compelling, and at times heartbreaking. The God I believe in and love gave me free agency, and I'm grateful for that truth. I kept wanting to share it with the girls in this story! This author knew a good story when she found one, and there are both tragic lessons and powerful messages of redemption and hope in it.

There is also—as a side-note—an interesting commentary about women's rights/identity in this book. Many of the men in this story seek to declare their sisters/wives/daughters in the Church of the Brides of Christ mentally insane because of their behavior. Notably NOT because of the sexual "rites" performed on the island commune, nor because of their prostrate prayers, or Bible-quoting. But because they wear their hair down, and refuse to wear corsets and shoes, and refuse to cook meals for their male family members. THAT, apparently in 1904, equals insanity. The irony is, of course, that the women WERE mentally delusional. But it was because they were under the influence of a hypnotic and dangerous man, not because of the way they dressed or their refusals to slave away in the home.
