



The Little Bride

Anna Solomon

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When 16-year-old Minna Losk journeys from Odessa to America as a mail-order bride, she dreams of a young, wealthy husband, a handsome townhouse, and freedom from physical labor and pogroms. But her husband Max turns out to be twice her age, rigidly Orthodox, and living in a one-room sod hut in South Dakota with his two teenage sons. The country is desolate, the work treacherous. Most troubling, Minna finds herself increasingly attracted to her older stepson. As a brutal winter closes in, the family's limits are tested, and Minna, drawing on strengths she barely knows she has, is forced to confront her despair, as well as her desire.

The Little Bride Details

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From Reader Review The Little Bride for online ebook

Suzanne Elizabeth Anderson says

Stories of early American pioneers creating new lives in the wild lands of the mid-Western plains are not new literary territory. Yet, the desolate environment provides an appealing backdrop for characters to test their mettle and authors to explore the themes of freedom and perseverance.

What Anna Solomon has accomplished in her debut novel, *THE LITTLE BRIDE*, is to take the familiar mail-order bride in the American Pioneer West story and add interesting twists based on little known, but actual, historical facts, such as the role of Jewish European settlers in the Great Plains. Her mail-order bride is a sixteen-year-old Ukrainian Jewish orphan from Odessa. She has been abandoned by her mother, left orphaned after her father's death, and taken in to become the housekeeper to an unstable, older woman. The novel begins with Minna's unsavory 'inspection' by the organizers of the mail-order bride exchange. The first hundred pages were frankly uncomfortable to read, with innuendoes of sexual abuse, an instance of graphic animal cruelty, and a brutal rape. All of which felt more manipulative of the reader's emotions than plot points necessary to move the story forward, since none of the incidents seemed to make any impact on the protagonist.

When Minna eventually reaches America and makes her way to her future husband and his mud-flat home in the Dakotas, she finds that she is to be married to a man more than twice her age, who is an inept farmer and the father of two sons, one of whom she will eventually fall in love with.

The traditional pioneer story might lead us to expect that *THE LITTLE BRIDE* will eventually find Minna overcoming the obstacles of her environment to build a successful life on the farm with her husband or the stepson who is closer to her in age. However, this novel is more about personal freedom than personal growth and it reads more like a contemporary, metropolitan coming of age story about self-empowerment than historical fiction. Especially given the protagonist's self-centered actions, which would have been unrealistic in early farming settlements when cooperative behavior was necessary for survival.

Perhaps the strangest aspect of *THE LITTLE BRIDE* only occurred to me on reflection: this may be the first book I've read where the hero's impact on every character she meets leaves them worse off. That's generally the consequence of meeting a villain. But it also explains why I didn't connect with this book. While in the end Minna does attain personal freedom, she never develops the compassion for others that marks true self-growth, her freedom comes at the expense of others. And for that reason, the novel feels incomplete and sadly unsatisfying. In the end, Minna seemed like a smart girl from the Big City dropped onto the Great Plains without a moral compass.

Laura says

I did not expect to dislike this book so much! I did not care for the story or the author's style. So much of the story was just pointless -- similar to a person talking just to hear herself speak. The book might make for good book club discussion, but that's all.

Susan says

I really wanted to like this novel. I heard so many good things about Little Bride. From the Jewish literary community, and from people that attended BEA. I have also contacted the author, from her website to ask if I

could review it. She sent me a copy.

But, I am sorry to say I did not enjoy reading it. I did not care for the characters, and I don't think the foul language was necessary.

In some respects the story reminded me of the novel, *Away* by Amy Bloom. Only because it was the hardships the character went through when she came to NYC. But, I think I liked the characters better.

Little Bride, I kept thinking of *Little House on the Prairie*. I kept seeing this in my head while I was reading it. There wasn't substance to the characters, and one dimensional. I did enjoy some of the writing though. Hence I gave it the extra star. I was expecting more from *Little Bride*. Hopefully, her next novel will have more depth.

The book was too predictable, most novels I like to read I want to learn something new. There was not anything I did not know. Per *Little Bride*, is about a young girl, Minna she is 16 years old. She is coming across America to marry a man, Max in arranged Jewish marriage. She dreams that life will be better in America. But, she is disappointed to find the man she is to marry is much older than her, orthodox, with little money. He is a older man, with two teenage boys, her age. She falls for one of his son's Samuel. Life is hard, and desolate in the winter, and very hard work she doesn't realize she must do to survive.

The author was inspired to write this because a little known history. Of Jews going to the mid west to make something of themselves, called Am Olan.

Am Olan movement began in the 1880's, Jews that came over to the new world. If they went to the mid west they would not meet the same anti semitism they had in Europe. It was a communal type setting, to build another life. The wealthier Jews were glad to see the poor Jews in this areas. They were embarrassed of them.

Alyson says

The blurb on this is weird, because it makes this book sound like a coming-of-age romance. Instead, it's really more of a character portrait of a semi-unlikeable young woman. Minna is clearly going through the motions in her life, doing what is expected of her, and this is brilliantly reflected in the writing, which can come off stilted and almost suffocating at times. She is a selfish, often uncaring person, looking upon her surroundings and others as if from a distance, studying them almost as if she doesn't understand these other humans. Her disdain for her husband, Max, is both revolting and completely understandable.

Minna's story, however, is lovely and sad; she is stuck living according to late-nineteenth century rural Jewish expectations while she--atheist and self-sufficient--would clearly thrive in a secular city. The lives of those around her are equally sad and somewhat pathetic; many of them are living, miserably, according to what they feel is expected of them, rather than living how they truly desire. The ending is, like the rest of Minna's story, off-putting but fitting.

Vicki says

Whew. This was a really striking read -- actually the second story I've read recently about a mail order bride from Odessa. You know, the easiest thing to let slip from your mind about life three to five generations ago was how major a move was. People in Europe simply didn't pick up and leave their towns that often. Yes, they'd go to a big city for work here and there, but people didn't just leave the birthright that was their home town the way they do in America (in the past half century, anyway). I speak about this from the point of view of the daughter and granddaughter of immigrants. My family didn't come to America until the late 50s, and that was major enough. Now imagine it being much earlier in the century. Imagine it being by boat. After you've been to a service to determine your fitness as a bride in some pretty questionable ways. Then get yourself to New York after an ocean voyage of incredible hardship, and from there, take the train all the way out to the Dakotas. That was what kept striking me about this book -- the shock of newness.

Minna is not all that likable much of the time. That's a sticky wicket for a reader. It's hard not to like the character who is guiding you through the story. But what Solomon does is make you understand the girl, and how ridiculously hard her situation is, how odd and uncomfortable on every single level. That makes this one, in addition to being a good page turner of solid literary fiction, a triumph.

Suzanne says

A good solid 4.5. After I read Edan Lepucki's review on GR a few months ago, I put this on my to-read list. Then a couple of weeks ago I heard the author discussing this on NPR and moved it to the top. Anna Solomon was talking about the historical background for her book, how Jewish pioneers in the 1800s were sent out to the West to homestead, inspired by the vision of creating "a new Palestine." But alas, most had zero in the way of farming experience or training, no mentors to guide them or resources to learn how to survive in this demanding and unforgiving enterprise. Sometimes it didn't go well.

"The Little Bride" is the story of a Russian girl, Minna, a mail order bride in 1889, bound for America. This is a young woman who has little to lose, as she is essentially an orphan. Her mother abandoned the family when she was a child, her father has died, and she's working as a maid and servant in Odessa. Solomon has described this book as a journey, and our experience of Minna's journey begins with her visit to the agency that is sending her to America. She endures a humiliating physical and mental examination that immediately grabbed my sympathy for this character. She is isolated but guardedly optimistic, with visions of a handsome husband, a townhouse with all the modern 19th century conveniences, and a life she can look forward to. Wow, is she ever disappointed.

After a harrowing sea voyage, in steerage class no less, where people are violently ill all the way across the Atlantic, some even dying, she arrives in New York and is met by one of her stepsons-to-be (surprise!) They travel west by train. And further west. And further. Until they are in Dakota Territory, before South Dakota is even a state. She finds herself in a world she'd never imagined, on a badly managed little farm in the middle of nowhere, preparing to marry a taciturn Orthodox Jew many years older than herself. But she's got nowhere else to go. The wedding scene is heartbreakingly sad.

The writing is vivid and takes us not only to 1889 South Dakota Territory, but into Minna's head as she tries to cope with her situation and find ways of dealing with it. There are a couple of neighbors, not geographically near, but in the general community, who befriend her and want to help. She receives advice from them, which she appreciates and tries to use. But she's essentially on her own, not knowing how to fit into the family dynamic or keep house in such a primitive environment or even how to feel about her future. An attraction to the older son further complicates things, as does an especially brutal winter.

The end of the book, while a surprise, actually seemed very fitting and natural. The character of Minna would have taken the actions she did in the end. It wasn't what I expected, but it was a believable resolution.

I'm very impressed by the quality of the writing. On the ship, at the end of the voyage, an incident occurs among the passengers involving hunger, abuse and brutality.

"If the passengers had known that the next day the sea would fall flat, that the gray sky would come undone with sun, perhaps events would have unfolded differently. Perhaps no one would have behaved so poorly if they'd known how close they were to the end: when the hatches were thrown open to the light, there was relief, yes, but also a woozy agony: people moved timidly, guarding faces with elbows, as if remembering a shameful dream that was dreamed too close to the surface of sleep."

Or:

"A long time ago, Minna had hated Galina for not remembering. She'd hated the indulgence of it, the waste. She'd thought memories were something you could and should choose to keep, that they would not forsake or smother you like real people or things, that if you cared for them, they would be immortal and fixed.

Then she'd begun to lose her own faces. Smells. Songs. What did her father's morning voice sound like? Who was the owner of the hand that gently stroked her head once, along the main street, and what had Minna done that she'd expected to be hit instead? Who had taught her, patiently, how to write? Had there been a building on the square that was made of brick? Why had she started collecting pebbles when she was very young, polishing them with her skirt, one by one, and putting them to bed in an old tobacco tin?

She felt sometimes as though she were walking blindfolded through a room, using only her fingers to see, and someone kept moving the furniture."

This story sucked me in so completely, I thought about this book between reading sessions. I definitely recommend this to my fiction writer friends, and anyone interested in studying the craft, for the skillful way it draws the characters and evokes a foreign world.

Marcie says

The Little Bride by Anna Solomon takes place in the late 1800s. The story begins in Odessa with the first glimpse of Minna. Minna is sixteen years old. She commits to a marriage that is arranged by an agency that fits wealthy, established Russian Jews with young brides. Although Minna is excited about her new life, she also has a lot of trepidation. However when she gets to America, Minna soon learns that things are not as she thought they would be.

Minna is the prominent character in this novel. Everything is told from her point of view. She is a well-written character with a range of emotions. She travels from Odessa to America in hard conditions. The only thing that really kept her hanging on is the new life promised to her in America. However Minna quickly discovers things are not as she thought. Her 'better life' is replaced by hardships and hard work. Not only that, her 'husband' is quite a bit older than she is and she's attracted to his oldest son who is closer to her age.

One of the things I love most about the novel is the detail that Anna Solomon puts into this novel. The way she describes everything from Minna's examination to the cold hard winters of North Dakota is phenomenal. She gave me a clear picture of what it must have been like during this time period. I think this really helps me understand the novel in a way I might not have before.

Overall I really like this novel. I was not familiar with this time period in history before I read this novel. I think Anna Solomon did a wonderful job showing the good and the bad. Her portrayal of the characters seems really realistic. This is a great book that is not only moving but also very insightful.

Edan says

Anna Solomon is a dear friend of mine and I had the pleasure of reading and critiquing early draft of this. I just finished re-reading the book (the published version!) this afternoon, and I am a bit breathless...it's such a beautiful, brave, compelling book about such flawed and complicated people who feel so incredibly real. I love the evocation of weather in this novel (so hot and dry! And then, wow, so c-c-cold!), and the way Solomon makes this particular moment of history come alive on the page. I love how stubborn and delusional and selfish and insecure and true Minna is. She is full of a longing that is real and meaningful and burdensome: oh, to be 16 and a mail order bride in The Middle of Nowhere, South Dakota! I love the Indians who are often talked about and wondered about, but never appear. I love how well Solomon captures sex without desire--how repugnant it is! And I love, love, love the language of this book, and the deft ways it compresses time and switches back and forth to different events within a few pages. The final chapter is my favorite for the way it just takes charge, and lets time fast forward.

This is a great first novel, and so hard to put down. Read it! I'm proud to be Anna's friend and writing buddy!

Romancing the Book says

Review by Sarah L: the emotional story of 16 year old Minna Losk who agrees to be a mail order bride to an unknown man in America. She endures hardship after hardship. Despite all the misery she encounters at such a young age, including her mother's desertion, her infant brother dying and her father's death along with her aunts kicking her out of her home afterward, she has dreams of a better life.

Minna has dreams and visions of a wonderful husband and a fancy home with servants but reality sets in when she finds instead a barren, desolate prairie land in South Dakota and a 40 year old man with 2 teenage sons whose first wife deserted them. Life is very rough for Minna. It is obvious she is unhappy and lonely. Instead of trying to strike up a conversation with Minna to get to know her, Max and the boys do all their talking after she has gone to bed.

The author has an interesting writing style which is at first I found confusing, distracting and a bit hard to decipher which led to me to go back and re-read paragraphs and pages. After about the first 60 pages however, I was able to adapt and followed along much more easily from that point on.

This story takes an emotional toll on a person. The author does a good job making the reader feel the range of emotions Minna experiences. Unfortunately she has a very rough life and it is a bit disheartening to read

about. It is a well-written story and the author portrays Minna's life very well however I found it difficult to stay interested.

Lesley says

I can't remember the last time I read a book as beautifully written as *The Little Bride*. The writing is just exquisite!

The story, while fiction, is based upon real events I knew nothing about, the settlement of the west by pioneer Jews from Russia. I knew there were Jewish peddlers (that's how Goldwater's Department Store started) but I knew nothing about actual Jewish farming settlements. So that information was quite interesting. In fact, many small parts of the story were from the author's family history or historical records she had researched.

The plot is not the most important aspect of this book. The story itself isn't a large one, but if you let the writing envelop you, it is perfectly told. It is the story of Minna, the main character, that is being related, and how people handle difficult circumstances. The other major players are not as well developed, but that does not detract from anything. The weather is a major aspect of the story, and it is especially here that the author excels.

So for those of you who enjoy excellent writing, an interesting plot, and seeing how people work out their problems, I highly recommend this book.

Elizabeth says

I just really did not enjoy this book very much. The writing wasn't terrible, although there were plot points and things I felt deserved more exploration and depth that were just abandoned along the wayside. The main character's utter selfishness was off-putting - she seemed to have an inner emotional life that was inaccessible to the reader (which is frustrating for me), and she really didn't grow in the slightest throughout the course of the book; she was still the same selfish person at the end of the novel as she was in the beginning.

I could not connect with the main character in any way, and it meant I really couldn't like the book, sadly. Additionally, the description of the book (it sounds like a romance, but I suspected it wasn't when I grabbed it for my Kindle, and it turns out I was right) makes it sound like she ends up loving her stepson. I don't know WHAT kind of love they mean, but to be honest, it really didn't feel much like love. It felt like a small amount of desire, followed by the same self-centered decisions she'd been making all along.

So yeah, not exactly a favorite. At all. And some of the least appealing descriptions of sex I've ever read.

Viviane Crystal says

Minna Losk has experienced much suffering by the time she's 16 years old. Her mother abandoned her father and her, and her father lives a tortured life between forgetting and memories that affect Minna until she lives her entire life surviving loss. Things are not much better after her father dies and she is shipped off to relatives and then a family who present as haunting, dysfunctional, and even mentally ill people. Her job is to be a serving girl. But lest one judge too quickly, these are Jewish people who live through the late 1800s pogroms in Odessa and other Russian towns. Waiting to be brutally attacked day after day after day could stretch any one's sanity to the limit!

Then Minna has the opportunity to become an American bride to an unknown man South Dakota. The journey overseas to her new home is fraught with watching people die from seasickness and starvation, with additional violent scenes to scar even the toughest character. It turns out she is about to marry into a home where the first wife has also abandoned the family, finding the wild West far too much for her grand ideas of living in America. Max's two sons, Sam and Jacob, believe Minna can never understand their past life. Their relationship is odd as they are closer in age to Minna and Max is twice her age and a religious Jew whose family believed he was going to become a famous Rabbi someday!

Minna typifies the harsh brutal life of a farmer's wife meant to help eke out a living on unyielding land, with no money to put into bettering a farm that is really not a farm. Suddenly a relationship develops between Minna and one of the sons, and secrets begin to be revealed.

While the plot seems fairly straight and even simplistic or stereotypical, there is nothing of that because of the way in which Anna Solomon takes the reader into Minna's mind, spinning stark and literate reflections with a tortured reality that defies one's idea of how much can be endurable. The Little Bride is a highly literate, uniquely lyrical account about the Jewish immigrant experience in a harsh American frontier that respects no gender, culture, or class. Remarkable novel!

Sharon says

I wanted to enjoy "The Little Bride". I liked the history in the book but this was a book that I could have put down and not picked up again. The beginning of the book is very bleak but I made myself keep reading to find out what happens to the main character. The book doesn't get any better. I didn't exactly want a happy ending but I did expect a more detailed ending. I don't recommend this book.

Gayle says

The Little Bride explores a piece of history I didn't know much about: mail-order Jewish brides coming from Eastern Europe to marry men who had settled in the American frontier in the late 1800s. Minna, a 16 year-old from Odessa whose father died and mother abandoned her, takes a chance on a life in America with a man she has never met, as a means to escape her life as a housemaid. Max, a Jewish immigrant in South Dakota, sponsors her passage to America to be his wife.

This book is grim, grim, grim. Minna's boat trip to America is horrible. When she arrives, she discovers that Max has two teenage sons from a wife who left him, and that they are failed farmers on a desolate piece of

property that hasn't yielded any produce. Max is Orthodox and strictly observant, and while he is kind to Minna, he is not particularly interested in her beyond her ability to bear him another child and keep house. He adheres to Orthodox rules even when they threaten his health, and his farming instincts are terrible. The foursome endure multiple hardships, including a winter so bleak that they barely make it through alive.

If Solomon wanted imply to convey the difficulties these immigrant settlers faced, she succeeded. But beyond that, the characters were very unlikeable and still unredeemed at the end. The story was so bleak that it was uncomfortable at times to read it. I acutely felt the claustrophobia of living in their little house (and before that the cave that they called home) – so, kudos for good writing – but sometimes I just had to put the book down.

The Little Bride was full of departures without goodbyes. Disconnection and detachment were clearly two of the book's main themes, so it's not surprising that I ultimately felt disconnected from the book. The lack of resolution and emotional engagement among the characters unfortunately permeated the reading experience as well.

Meredith Allard says

This is my favorite type of historical novel to read: a novel that introduces me to a time I wasn't familiar with, a time I should know about. Because of my own Jewish heritage, or because of my fascination with the Pioneer era from my time in Boise, Idaho, I was drawn to this lyrical, poetic first novel by Anna Solomon.

Sixteen year old Minna Losk leaves Odessa--a difficult land of pogroms--to be a mail-order bride. Only she doesn't find the American life she wanted. Her husband Max is older, stringent, and poor, and there are his two teenage sons, one of whom Minna finds herself attracted to. The work in South Dakota is hard, the land barren and nothing. Minna must come to terms with herself, her life, and her desires, if she will ever find peace.

America is a land of immigrants, and to understand the story of this country we should consider the lives of the people who left their homelands behind to begin here anew. There is a sparse, poetic flow to Solomon's language which I liked, and as I read this story I could see myself in Minna's place, in her life. What would I do? How would I face these challenges in the difficult, dangerous frontier that Minna must face? This story is a glimpse into the lives of the Jewish immigrants, the pioneers, and their struggles to create new lives for themselves. It is about hope in the face of adversity.

The Little Bride is a fine work of literary historical fiction. I'm looking forward to reading more from Anna Solomon.
