



Bride of a Stranger

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Claire is too innocent to suspect that her marriage is a cruel farce, believing instead that the dangerous accidents that keep appearing in her path are just that?accidents.

She wedded Justin Leroux suddenly and silently. He was the tall dark stranger of her girlhood dreams, and had finally come to take her away. She returns with him to Sans Songe, the Leroux family plantation in Louisiana. A near-fatal accident on the road to the plantation does not bode well for her future there. And indeed, many nasty surprises await her at the plantation itself. Voodoo magic, poisoned food, and a murder mystery force Claire into a stalemate. She is helpless within the bosom of her frigid and isolating new family, while her husband has yet to come to her bed. He may even be hoping for her destruction, as she is drawn into an ever more tangled web of passion and intrigue...

Bride of a Stranger Details

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Author : Jennifer Blake

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From Reader Review *Bride of a Stranger* for online ebook

Uyen89 says

Good read

So my second book from this author and so far my only complaint is there is not enough interaction between the two leading characters. It seem that way in her other book too.

There is a lot more mysteries and a lot less romance. So if that is your thing than this the book for you.

Right now I'm in the mood for a good gothic tail so I'm moving to the next book.

PS, other than the themes (Gothic thriller) nothing else ties these stories together. The two books I read are not even the same time period. So definitely can read as a stand alone.

Jenna says

Partly, good somehow I feel like the end of the plot is lacking. The story was focused on other people around them mostly, and the protagonist sound like helpless. I know he's trying to accommodate his new wife, but leaving her in the house without asking her whereabouts. The killer plotted to get rid of her, which living in the midst of them, and Leroux the protagonist doesn't have any idea at all, until his bride was going to get slaughtered.

WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says

I read this for the Southern Gothic square for Halloween Bingo

“It’s a death gris-gris, and as its counterpart in the hands of the Voodooienne is unwrapped slowly, day by day, it is supposed to cause the cursed one to sicken and die by degrees.”

This started off with so much promise but ultimately didn't deliver on delicious Gothic feel. We started off with a sheltered, innocent heroine who is swept away by a dark scarred hero to his on the edge of the bayou plantation. There we meet his at odds with mother, still wearing black for the death of his years long dead uncle, his maybe jealous vengeful cousin, a possible voodoo using maybe ex-mistress, a creepy overseer, a parental but maybe shady housekeeper, and a paralyzed unable to speak father. The red-herrings are all over the place.

The atmosphere was set nicely with descriptions of the bayou, heat, bugs, and general out in the middle of nowhere. There was a voodoo scene with the slaves performing a ritual that was kind of creepy but other than that, there wasn't enough played around with to make you wonder if the heroine was losing her mind or if the voodoo was real.

The heroine and hero basically spend no time together, which I thought was kind of odd, so you're not

reading this for the romance aspect. There wasn't enough creepy, spooky feel for a Gothic either; the mystery has the heroine in bed for most of the book.

Helene, that arrogant, time-ravaged beauty, had been in love with her husband's brother, so in love that ten years later she could still weep her heart out over a mask of his dead face. Her husband's brother, a married man with a son, a man who was shot to death in a duel with his nephew, Helene's one son!

I kind of got the feeling the author was going for a nothing proves more terrifying than family dynamics. I can't really dispute that.

The mystery could have been better if the heroine would have been able to move around more and the characters given more depth, basically this needed a higher page count as the basic storyline and atmospheric writing was there. The ending gave us a villain info-dump as to why and how that gave it super flop feel and red-herring characters simply deflated like balloons. I can't really recommend this one because the Gothic mystery and the romance was severely lacking, maybe if you like your heroines reclining in bed because of bruised ribs and possible poisonings and/or voodoo curses.

*I almost forgot to mention the jaguar! Yes, there is a jaguar that lurks around, two or three mentions but it is there, lol.

Doreen says

Jennifer Blake does the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bayou so well. There are secrets going back years which pose a threat to the bride in question, and she must find some gumption to help reveal them.

Heather says

This was another Kindle freebie. There's a lot of gratuitous French and a dead rooster and stuff about how her feeble strength was no match for the iron bands of his arms. Which makes it sound like this book was far racier than it actually was. When it fact, it wasn't racy at all -- the hero spent a lot of time plundering her soft mouth, and then letting her go. What, I ask you, is the point of that?

I think setting romance novels in the antebellum south is just a bad idea -- because you can either write characters who are improbably ahead of their time and not racist or you can write characters who are believable products of their time, and then the reader is pretty much going to hate them. These are equally bad options. JB went with the latter, so there's lots of stuff from the main characters about how the faithful house slave is devoted to his master and savage voodoo drums.

Ginger says

Delightful! If it's Gothic, it's in this book. Plantation house in the middle of the swamp? check. Brooding dark husband with family secrets? Check. Panthers, poison, Voodoo? check, check, and check! Pure Gothic Romance with a mystery and very little kissing.

I was a fan of Victoria Holt when I was younger, and this book is right in that field. Pure escapism. I kept

reading the prose out loud to my spouse for his enjoyment too ?

Susan (susayq ~) says

This was really more of a mystery than a romance. It was dark and sometimes just down right creepy. The family dynamics of Justin's family had my head spinning....strange bunch of people and how they're really connected to one another. At least Justin and Claire will get their HEA ;)

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

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So, my current TBR-clearing "project" is to get through all of the Jennifer Blake books on my Kindle because I think it's so awesome how often she makes her books free, and I think the temptation with free books is to set them aside and focus your attention on the books you spent actual money on (I do that). However, I also think it's really important to encourage and support the authors who are so generous, which is why I'm trying to read and review her books.

When it comes to her books, I think I mostly prefer her bodice-rippers just because she can actually write good smut and her heroes seem to be of the cool and icy variety, which I prefer. Her Gothic romances are more hit or miss, and sometimes appear under the name "Patricia Maxwell" instead of "Jennifer Blake."

BRIDE OF A STRANGER is one of her better Gothic romances, probably because the other two I read felt kind of like carbon copies of one another, with the heroine appearing by carriage on the porch steps of an imposing Southern Gothic manor with nowhere else to go but to rely on the mercy of distance (and cruel, and mysterious) relatives who might or might not want to kill her.

In BRIDE OF A STRANGER, Claire is on the verge of announcing her betrothal to her milquetoast cousin, Jean-Claude, when she locks eyes with a stranger at a crowded ballroom. That stranger is Justin Leroux, who takes enough of a fancy to her that he threatens to call out her cousin if she refuses to marry him instead. Justin happens to be an especially trained and ruthless swordsman, and her cousin is not, so her aunt decides that she doesn't really care for Claire all that much and basically leaves her at the mercy of this possible madman, because not her boy, her precious boy!

Justin takes Claire to his estate, *Sans Songe*, which is populated with people who are obviously freed slaves (and there are some antiquated and un-PC references to black people that may offend, but seem to fit the era). More offensive probably are the voodoo stereotypes, which are lavishly sensational, and involve a woman dancing naked before ritualistically sacrificing a chicken. Voodoo plays a pretty heavy role in this book, as it becomes clear upon Claire's arrival that someone wants her dead, and she keeps finding evil voodoo charms in her belongings, poison in her food, and at one point, imprisoned and seemingly left for harm.

There are many culprits to choose from, from the jealous multiracial ex-mistress (and voodoo priestess), to the suspicious and sinister relatives, who are much more disturbing than they appear (one even has a Miss Havishamesque shrine to her late husband, including but not limited to a death mask). All the while, Claire nurses suspicion and resentment against her husband, who might also be a killer himself, even if it isn't clear whether he's the only person who might be able to keep her alive.

The WTFery was off the charts with this one, which I appreciated, because I think a lot of Gothic novels are far too lacking (to their detriment). Jennifer Blake is also an excellent writer and her descriptions of food, clothing, and architecture are enough to make a writer cry (I tell you this with great certainty, being a writer myself - I desperately want to be as good as Jennifer Blake when I grow up). I don't think her books are for everyone because they are un-PC, but I'm also very glad that she doesn't appear to be self-censoring her work the way many other historical romance authors from back in the day are when republishing her books on Kindle, as the past wasn't PC, and there was a certain romance novel "aesthetic" in the 60s-80s that has a certain tawdry charm from its utter lack of f*cks when it comes to caring about what might or might not offend the readers.

P.S. There's a certain scene in here that might make you bite your nails. Don't worry, the cat doesn't die.

3.5 stars

Julie says

Bride of a Stranger by Jennifer Blake was originally published in 1990. This book is now available in digital format and is published by Steel Magnolia Press LLC.

This book is part of the Gothic Classics Collection.

Living in New Orleans, Claire has her life planned. Although there has been no formal announcement, it is common knowledge that she will marry her cousin, eventually.

However, when a dark, disfigured man of wealth and mystery sees Claire at a gathering, he makes Claire's aunt an offer she can't refuse. Claire now has no other choice but to marry Justin.

Justin was scarred as a child by a cousin, leaving him with a "C" shaped scar on his face. But, Justin runs a plantation and is wealthy and powerful with a sinister reputation. When he sees Claire, he knows instantly that he must have her.

Claire moves to Justin's plantation home, leaving behind New Orleans. Before they arrive however, there is a near fatal accident and Claire spends her first months in bed recovering from her injuries. But, she is also ill and can't see to gain strength.

Voodoo and Justin's strange family relations, keeps Claire in a nervous state, believing that someone is poisoning her and she believes her new husband is also a murderer.

Determined to keep Justin at arms length, Claire refused to accept her attraction to this man that forced her into marriage.

Written in true southern Gothic style, Jennifer Blake combines the traditional Gothic elements with the cultural history of Louisiana. Voodoo, magic, quadroon mistresses, arranged marriages, family secrets, and large plantations create the backdrop of mystery and romance.

Anyone that knows me, will tell you that if a novel has the word "Gothic" attached to it in any way, I'm all over it.

Jennifer Blake is a favorite author of mine, but I had no idea this book was out there. Thankfully, Steel Magnolia Press has re-released a sizable backlist of these books in digital format.

The more modern reader may not appreciate this type of novel, having completely missed out on the Gothic mystery/romance rage so very popular in the 1960's and 70's. Blake puts her own stamp on the genre by using the Gothic 'rules', but instead of a creepy castle or mansion, the setting is in the south on a large plantation home. But, the sinister occupants of the house with their many secrets and hidden resentfulness and motives, on top of the accurate depictions of voodoo rituals and beliefs make this take on the Gothic novel really unique.

I'm really glad I was able to get this one for my kindle. I don't know if you can still get the old paperback version anywhere, so thankfully we can still read these classics.

Overall this one gets an A.

<http://smarturl.it/smp> for more great novels from Steel Magnolia Press.

Camryn Shannon says

Claire de Hauterive is all set to marry her cousin until a scar-faced, yet still attractive stranger, Justin Leroux, blackmails her into marrying him. At Sans Songe, his plantation near the bayou outside of New Orleans, a suspicious accident leaves behind death before Claire even enters the house for the first time. Among the deep, dark forest snakes, alligators, prowling panthers and other predators, both human and animal, surround Claire. Who can she trust?

Shocking family secrets lurk behind each bedroom door at Sans Songe. While forbidden loves, old and new, linger inside the house, outside a powerful voodoo priestess and a jealous mistress of Justin's vow revenge. Yet, someone else harbors even stronger hate while deceiving the new BRIDE OF A STRANGER.

Characters in this classic gothic romance are interesting and unique, their motivations strong, their passions entwined in a riveting plot of mysterious magic, love, hate and intrigue. Jennifer Blake's classic gothic, BRIDE OF A STRANGER, is masterfully written and kept me guessing clear to the end who the devious

villain is. I hated to leave Sans Songe when I came to the last page.

Army-mom says

This has a little everything in it, romance, trust issues, family issue that go way back, lots of secrets, voodoo (New Orleans), wealth, Alpha male type loves a strong women.

Joanne says

I'm glad to see so many of Jennifer Blake's titles available as e-books, particularly the kindle bundles which package the books by themes (Louisiana History, Classic Gothics, Louisiana Plantation, Love and Adventure, etc...). Her southern historical romances are well-written with careful attention to historical details. *Bride of a Stranger* is a fairly predictable mystery set at a remote Louisiana plantation owned by the dark and secretive master, Justin Leroux. He brings his reluctant city-bred bride into a frightening world of swamps and family secrets, ancient rituals, voodoo queens, and murder. Very little romance to speak of here, but those looking for the hard-to-find southern romance/gothic will find this a satisfactory read.

A.M. says

Oh boy... I was with kid 2 at the physio and realised I had forgotten my book. I brought his book instead, curse you Jim Butcher. Kid 2 was happy. So I pulled out my phone and started on a recent download. I squeal loudly... omg, he's a rake, and he has a crescent shaped facial scar, and he dances! Squee. Everyone gives me a very odd look.

Claire sees Justin Leroux at a ball and comments that she feels pity for him for bearing the mark of Cain. Oopsies.

Her cousin tells her Justin killed his uncle in a duel and took his estate.

Justin notices Claire. He is utterly determined to change her mind. After one dance and an inappropriate conversation on the balcony, he says he will ask her to marry him. She laughs, but the next morning her aunt says this:

“This man,” she waved toward Justin, speaking of him as if he were not there, “has taken a leaf from their book. He knows that he cannot approach your uncle in the usual way. His past deeds, the lack of esteem in which he is held, his manner of living, and his too obvious contempt for society would make it impossible for my husband to consider his suit if he should press it according to custom. But he is aware that few men in New Orleans can hope to defeat him in a duel, indeed few of the maître d’armes would care to cross swords with him. And so he threatens to force a meeting upon Jean-Claude, unless you are given to him.”(Kindle Locations 262-266).

Given the threat against her son and husband, Claire’s aunt just throws her **at** the wolf.

We’ll tell everyone it is a grand passion, she blithely says. The men are out, Claire is alone and Justin is holding her hand. Left together, he points out to her just how fast her aunt threw her away.

Ouch.

They are officially engaged in a week.

and the morning after his return the corbeille de noce, a basket of gifts from the groom arrived. It contained a handkerchief edged in lace as fine as cobwebs, a fine hat veil of lace to screen her complexion from the sun and a fan of white silk edged in lace and marabou tufts and with sticks inlaid with mother-of-pearl. There was a cashmere shawl in a delicate shade of blossom pink, so fine it could be pulled through a ring, two pairs of kid gloves with meticulously set-in fingers, a comb for her hair with gold and mother-of-pearl inlay, a cameo of Louis XVII, and a pair of earrings, pearls shaped like teardrops. (Kindle Locations 345-346).

A wedding basket - a kind of trousseau. And an expensive one.

She was previously unofficially betrothed to her cousin Jean-Claude and she lies to him. She's happy, she swears, when he asks.

Gossip tells her that Justin has dispensed with his quadroon mistress, Belle-Marie, paid her off well, even as she both threatened to kill herself or revenge herself on him. He could have kept her and just moved her to the plantation, so she's toast. Somehow a gris gris gets into Claire's room and Belle-Marie loiters outside of the cathedral after the ceremony. There is no time for a wedding night and the standard five days locked up together, they are off for his plantation.

From then on, things go awry. The carriage crashes, Claire breaks a rib in the accident, then is poisoned, and the family frighten her. The ex-mistress hangs around the plantation. And she's a voodoo priestess.

Justin's mother, Helene behaves oddly. His Aunt Berthe keeps every item of her dead husband's including a bronze of his death mask. Their son Edouard is the one who gave Justin his scar as children. C for captive.

He now collects knives. Justin's father Marcel, has had a stroke and can no longer speak. He tries hard to communicate with Claire but she doesn't understand. The overseer Ben looks at Claire with lustful eyes and asks Justin if he can have Belle-Marie now.

The only one who is a little okay is Aunt Octavia.

The panther screams in the bayou, the secrets of the house poison everyone.

Oooh... wonderful formulaic stuff.

(view spoiler)

Bwahaha - atta girl, Claire.

(hide spoiler)]

It is a 'sweet' romance (no sex). Justin does not force himself on his wife. Her broken rib, then her illness make it tricky and by then he is, of course, in love with her. He works hard all day so that he falls into an exhausted sleep in his trundle bed across the foot of her bed. Under the same mosquito net but far away from temptation. *Sighs happily*

Like most of these Louisiana Gothics, the slaves are disposable. Problematic, I know. This is another re-release from 1974. (I think these may be my favourite Blake novels.)

4 stars

Monique says

Ah, Claire...forced into marrying Justin and by extension, his whack-a-do family out in the Louisiana swamps. 'Bride of a Stranger' had such a Grand Guignol feel about it that I was rolling my eyes some of the time, laughing at other times, and inhaling in semi-shock. In other words, even though it was a bit dated and melodramatic, I quite enjoyed it.

Heather *Awkward Queen and Unicorn Twin* says

[the hero. He starts out kind of dark and asshole-ish, using forceful means to persuade the heroine's family to let her marry him (I guess because he's too proud and ashamed of his f
