



A Beauty So Rare

Tamera Alexander

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From the USA Today bestselling author of *To Whisper Her Name* and *A Lasting Impression* comes a moving historical novel about a bold young woman drawn to a group of people forgotten by Nashville society--and to the one man with whom she has no business falling in love.

Eleanor Braddock, a spinster--plain, practical, no stunning Southern beauty--has long since dismissed any hope of marriage. But when a dying soldier whispers his final words, she believes her life can still have meaning and determines to find his widow. But this compassionate deed takes a harsh turn, and Eleanor finds herself dependent upon the richest woman in America and the most despised woman in Nashville--her aunt, Adelia Acklen, mistress of Belmont Mansion. A clandestine act of kindness leads Eleanor to an unlikely path for her life--building a home for destitute widows and children from the Civil War. And while Eleanor knows her own heart, she also knows her aunt will never approve.

Gerhard Marcus Gottfried, Archduke of the House of Habsburg and fourth in line to the Austrian throne, arrives in Nashville in search of a life he determines, instead of one determined for him. Collaborating with botanist Luther Burbank, Marcus seeks to combine his own passion for nature with his expertise in architecture. But his plans to incorporate natural beauty into the design of the widow's and children's home run contrary to the wishes of practical, frugal Eleanor, who sees his ideas as costly nonsense.

Yet as the construction project continues, Marcus and Eleanor find common ground--and a love neither of them expected. But Marcus is not the man Adelia has chosen for Eleanor to marry, and even if he were, someone who knows Marcus's secrets is about to reveal them all.

A Beauty So Rare Details

Date : Published March 25th 2014 by Bethany House Publishers (Baker Publishing Group)

ISBN :

Author : Tamera Alexander

Format : Kindle Edition 400 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Christian Fiction, Romance, Christian, Historical Romance, Fiction

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From Reader Review A Beauty So Rare for online ebook

Kellyn Roth says

Originally posted on Reveries Reviews.

When I began this book, it'd been a while since I'd read anything by Tamera Alexander. I really love her writing style, and this was no exception.

Historic Nashville is such an intriguing place, and the characters in it – some based on real-life, other fabricated – are equally as fascinating. I really adored this book. The historical details were amazing, I liked both Eleanor and Marcus, and of course I still love 'Aunt Adelia.' She's really the most amazing character ever. I wish I could have known her (though I doubt we would see eye to eye in real life; we're both too independent).

I did chop off half a star because it did seem to drag just a little here and there. A few too many botany details, I think.

4.5/5 stars

~Kellyn Roth, Reveries Reviews

Jamie says

This book is amazing. Boom. Done.

Oh, so you were looking for little more with this review? That's fair, so how about: This book is really, really, realllllly amazing, so read it! Like now!

Alright...alright...I'll try and share my love for this novel in a only a few words...

My first thought after finishing A Beauty So Rare was that I didn't give it permission to end. I was not prepared nor willing for this story to end. But it did anyways.

So rude.

But y'all. I cried. I sighed. And then cried again.

I love stories where you connect so deeply with characters, you feel like they're friends. Not only is that the case with both Eleanor and Marcus, but Tamera also creates incredible secondary characters as well. I wanted to be friends with the good ones and slap the other ones. A couple of side snaps of "oh no you didn't" would have worked too. (Clearly I would have fit right in post Civil War Nashville).

Another thing I loved about this book? The discussion of beauty. What makes a person truly beautiful and how do we live that out? This book (as well as her other ones) also have a way of making the character's faith natural. There's some books I encounter that make me cringe because it's so blatant or over the top

a.k.a. NOT REAL LIFE. So while faith is in the book, it's beautifully done. You see the character's development, you see why it's important to them and how it impacts their life.

It also reminded me that Tamera Alexander's books are absolutely worth waiting for. I've read every single one and want to read every single one again. If you haven't encountered her books, my dear sweet friend you need to fix that right quick!

So readers, have you read any of Tamera's books? What's one of your favorite time periods to read?

(Thank you Bethany House for the copy in exchange for my honest review)

Originally posted at <http://booksandbeverages.org/2014/04/...>

Carrie Pagels says

Beauty So Rare, A
~Bethany House Publishers

5.0 out of 5 stars Another Belmont Hit!, March 24, 2014
By Carrie F. Pagels "Carrie Fancett Pagels"

This review is from: Beauty So Rare, A (A Belmont Mansion Novel Book #2) (Kindle Edition)

What a wonderful read! A Beauty So Rare starts out a little bit slow but have no worries, Tamera Alexander soon takes off with a story wonderfully woven. I was tickled pink over heroine, Eleanor's reaction to certain colors of clothing, which I enjoy. Mr. Geoffries, a German archduke, and is a wonderful hero. Eleanor is strong and capable and learns to trust her heart, over the course of the story. Loved the secondary characters, with the widowed ladies and their children receiving help through the H/H's efforts. Some terrific antagonists, with great characterization. Highly recommend--don't miss this!

This is the second book in the Belmont series and I can't wait to read the next book when it releases!

This book will be on my best of 2014 list on my blog, Overcoming With God.

I purchased this book as a paperback through Amazon but I also received a Kindle copy through NetGalley and am under no compulsion to post a positive review. The reviewers on the OWG blog love Tamera's books so much that we made sure everyone got a copy of this new release, in paperback, for the gorgeous cover, too.

Joyce says

Library copy. This is my first read by this author, though I've been aware of her for some years. Though it is classified as historical fiction, I would call it historical romance, which is not my favorite genre. That being said, for a good portion of the book I had a love-hate relationship with the story. Obviously from my rating, the book won.

I love the cover! The characters are well developed and intricate and diverse (and more than a few but not confusing). The action started on page 1 and continued to page 471. The story mostly takes place in Nashville, Tennessee, but in several defined settings which are clearly defined.

Since I am unfamiliar with the history of the period, and of the Belmont Mansion, I am not in a position to comment on the author's coverage of historical events, which are intricately woven into the plot and characters, most of which I believe are fictitious.

My favorite character is Caleb. I love his place in the story, and would love to read a book devoted to his development and adulthood. This book has much potential for spinoffs. I could relate well to Eleanor on several levels.

I love how the underlying themes work into the overarching theme, and faith in God is foundational and developed on a personal level. There is conflict throughout much of the book, but the story is not dark nor is hope ever lost. It's a lovely story from which I learned about myself and hopefully acted on that which convicted me in the parts to which I originally objected. It has given me pause to consider my attitude toward the romance genre.

I highly recommend this book to mature readers, older teens and adults. It's definitely an adult story.

Hannah says

An excellent Reconstruction-era tale about a young woman, impoverished in war, attempting to take care of her father, who is losing his reason to dementia. Her very rich cousin-by-marriage takes her in and means well by her, but doesn't understand Eleanor's passion for cooking.

I loved the rich historical detail, the colorful characters, and also that the romantic parts were subdued rather than soapy. I also loved that Eleanor isn't beautiful and is a tall heroine! And the cover matching the story so perfectly was a pleasant plus (conservatory, pink dress, etc).

Part of a series, but not a heavily connected one; the books may be read out of order without confusion.

Kate (The Shelf Life) says

I'm kind of reading this series in reverse, but thankfully, it works. I started with the last book in the series first, A Note Yet Unsung. Even though these books are in order, they can still work as a stand-alone.

Tamera Alexander brings post Civil War Nashville to life in this 2nd installment of the Bellemont Mansion series. There is very intricate detail to the historical facts that pop off of the page. The characters are very well fleshed out. Along with those two very important things, she has very real issues for these characters to face.

Elanor Braddock is a woman, who is now a spinster at her age. She is considered plain, and is now poor woman, who must rely on extended family to get by. She must also worry about and care for her fathers failing mental health. There wasn't a lot of knowledge of dementia and other mental issues at the time, but

with the portrayal that Tamera showed, I would hope it was like it. It was heart breaking to read about, but the love that Elanor showed was hopeful and the staff she had to rely on, you routed for best outcome possible, even though with how it is today, you already know how it is.

It was a tough subject, but it was an amazing topic to be touched on.

Marcus has been added to my dream hero list. He was one who even though had a rough past, wants to change from it. He doesn't want to follow in his family footsteps. And what a family he has! The mystery and intrigue behind them kept me wanting to read more.

Marcus and Elanor I thought were the perfect balance to each other. They came from different backgrounds, but their passions were similar. Elanor was a woman who had very giving heart and seeing what all she was willing to give up to help made me think and ask, what could I do. Even though fictional, she was an inspiring character. Her desire for those around her was fantastic to read about.

I can't wait to read the first book from this series and see all the pieces. I also can't wait to go and search out even more books by Tamera Alexander. She is an author who has moved to my favorites list.

This review was originally posted @ www.readwithkate.com

Bluerose's Heart says

Hug-worthy! Gush-worthy! I adored(ADORED!!!)this book, from beginning to end!

Eleanor won a place in my heart as one of my favorite leading ladies to ever pass through my reading imagination. She's considered "plain" as far as her outward appearance goes. She's exceedingly tall for a lady, taking her looks from her father, and well past the "marrying" age. With so many men lost to the war, combined with her "plainness", she's given up hope of a husband. Inward, though, she's as beautiful as they come! Her father suffers from Alzheimer's and barely remembers her. When he does, it's with anger. Despite missing him terribly, and knowing she has to make a way for herself, she doesn't roll around in self pity. She rolls her sleeves up and tackles the world with her humble stubbornness, and I loved that about her.

Marcus! He won himself a place in my reading heart, too! I'm not typically a fan of the whole "bad boy" thing. Marcus is Austrian, and has a bit of an arrogant attitude about him. He was also once a "bad boy". Within this story, he's anything but, though. I enjoyed all the "plant talk" and creative architect imaginings that he brings into the story.

A Beauty So Rare is seriously one of the sweetest romances I've ever read! It's not all romance, though. There's an abundance of layers added within this book. There's a little mystery that I almost forgot about through part of the story. There's encouragement to pull ourselves out of our own little world and help those in need. I was left with many things to ponder as I closed the last page with a happy sigh. And, again, there's the sweet(so very sweet) romance. It's not a quick read by any means. I encourage you to read it slowly and simply enjoy your time in it. It's what I consider a "chunkster", but well worth the time investment. I'd also encourage you to read A Lasting Impression first, just so you can have a better appreciation for Adelia. You probably won't like her at all without reading A Lasting Impression first. Otherwise, it's perfectly fine as

a standalone.

I loved this book so much, I'm determined to convince you to put all other reading aside, and read the two books in this series! I smiled, laughed, cried, and ended the book with a little hug. What more could you ask for from a book?! ;)

*Thank you to Bethany House for providing me with a review copy in exchange for my honest opinion!

Brooke Barenfanger says

I was very excited when I saw the cover for *A Beauty so Rare*. I have to say, before reading it I was wondering whether the plot would be a repeat of the first two books in the series. However, it was decidedly not. It wasn't much similar to *Lasting Impressions* or *To Whisper Her Name* save for the time period. But I think I enjoyed it even more than them, if that is even possible.

I have read all of Tamera Alexander's books and I do believe that *A Beauty so Rare* is my absolute favorite of all that she has written yet! I think it's because her heroine was so unique. Most heroine's I read about are pretty and feminine and dreamy and sweet. Eleanor Braddock is considered plain and sensible and too tall. I think I liked her all the more because the author chose to make her those things. Again and again Eleanor's practical side was revealed. Practicality is usually not a trait in the women of historical Christian fiction published today. But it certainly was in Eleanor.

Marcus was also an enjoyable character. He offset Eleanor's practical side perfectly. I loved reading how their banter played out throughout the novel. It was almost flirting but not quite because they were both determined to be "just friends". Yes...well...saying that never really does seem to work, does it? I really liked how he kept on going after what he wanted. No matter if it was his career, the new kind of potato he was trying to breed, or the woman he fell in love with, he kept pursuing and never gave up. He also showed remarkable restraint and respect toward Eleanor, which I greatly admire. He was also patient and intelligent and strong and...well...nearly perfect now that I think about it. His flaw was that he had a somewhat shady past despite his being an Archduke. But other than that he was perfect.

The relationship between Eleanor and her aunt was both well-written and complex. Adelica Acklen was, after all, the richest woman in America. I think I held my breath every time Eleanor needed to talk to her about something. Adelicia had the most interesting personality which was both undeniably feminine and unbelievably headstrong. She always knew her opinions, stuck to her ideals, and never wavered in anything. I found the conversations she had with Eleanor quite interesting. And sometimes I couldn't help but cringe and think, "Poor Eleanor!" with absolute horror as her aunt severely scolded her for something. But unlike most female characters, Eleanor was always practical about her emotional response to her aunt's sometimes severe diatribes. She never cried. She adjusted her behavior and moved on, never thinking about it twice.

I have always admired the way Tamera Alexander incorporates other languages in her books. German was highly prominent in this one. However, I was somewhat confused when sometimes the German was not translated. I was left a little bewildered and trying to piece together what the characters were saying. I can't read German, though it is slightly similar to English. At a few places I had to go back and re-read the German to try to find out what was said because it was not translated. Sometimes the translation was given a few pages later, though. But most often not. This was the only flaw I could find with the book as a whole. Otherwise, it was perfectly delightful and wonderful in every way. Though *A Beauty So Rare* is close to 500

pages, because I had such a blissful experience reading it I sooo wanted there to be more once I reached the end!

One more thing I'll mention that I was impressed with before I conclude. She included characters from her last two books! I almost didn't catch their subtle introduction to the story because it has been so long since I've read *To Whisper Her Name* and *Lasting Impressions*. However, I managed to do so and enjoyed the novel even more because I did. So, although her books do not need to be read together I do suggest reading them in the order they were published because it will increase your enjoyment of each story. Also (and I just realized this) *To Whisper Her Name* is the first in the Belle Meade Plantation Series. *Lasting Impressions* is the first in the Belmont Mansion Series and *A Beauty so Rare* is the second in the Belmont Mansion Series. However, they all three still are set in the same time frame with characters that intertwine with one another, though loosely.

Bravo, Tamera Alexander! I am expectantly looking forward to your next novel. I didn't want *A Beauty so Rare* to end and was thoroughly disappointed that it had to. Your book left me breathless sometimes and blissful the rest of the time. I do believe that this one has a 100% chance of my reading it again! May the Lord bless you in the writing of your next novel. It cannot come soon enough for me!

I give this book 4/12 out of 5 stars.

*I received a complimentary review copy of this book from the publishers for an honest review, which I have given. The opinions expressed in this review are mine and mine alone.

Rachael says

I am so thankful that the author is not afraid to write a long book. It is not long for the sake of being long, but long to do justice to the plot, and she certainly does that. Besides working several plot threads that require time, Alexander develops the characters, the setting, and the historic detail that bring the novel to life, turning the length purely to her advantage. There is no pointless puttering around, but every passage is working towards the conclusion.

The author does a marvelous job setting the story in history. It is not just a romance that takes place after the Civil War - it is a meticulously researched tale firmly anchored in the Reconstruction era with real people and events. The rise of women's shelters, safe asylums for the insane, troubled relations between Austria and Russia, research with plant genetics and grafting, the search for a potato not prone to rot - all were issues being dealt with at the time. Not only were Adelicia Acklen, her immediate family, and her servants all real, set in the meticulously described Belmont estate, but so also were numerous places described in Nashville, such as the insane asylum. Additionally, historic figures such as Dorothea Dix (activist for the insane), Gregor Mendel (geneticist), and Luther Burbank (developer of the Russet potato) cameo in the story.

One of the strongest themes of the story (hinted at by the title) is that of beauty. Eleanor knows that true beauty is dependent on what is inside a person, not in their outward appearance; however, as a plain woman, she struggles with the fact that, by worldly standards, she isn't beautiful. There are few women I've known who cannot relate with that feeling of deficiency, no matter their outward appearance. And the author makes a really good point - something I have noticed myself - that the better you know someone and the more you love them, the more beautiful they become. And conversely, the uglier a person acts, the less and less attractive they appear, no matter how physically flawless. In this world where so much weight is placed on

physical appearance, it is good to be reminded of what beauty truly is.

I suspect historical novels such as this - by captivating my interest and prompting me to research further - have led to as much if not more of my knowledge of history than I learned in school. Like all of Alexander's books, this novel is rich with historic detail, a well-thought-out plot, faith, and encouragement. 5 out of 5 stars!

Thank you First Reads and Bethany House for providing a free copy!

Rachel says

Part of what I said about the first novel of this series holds true for this second one: "I really loved this historical novel. It was a complex, sweet story, and I enjoyed the characters." Also like the first novel, this second one was written well and had well developed characters; however, there wasn't an element of suspense in this one as there was in the first, which I was a bit disappointed by, but I still really loved the novel and how the main characters gradually ended up truly becoming known to the other with no important secrets left between them. So, this novel joins its predecessor on my favorites list.

Kara says

My Comments

What a DE-LIGHT-FUL book!! Goodness, this is my first time reading Alexander's work, but I sensed something SOOOOOO special about this story I couldn't pass it up.....indeed, EVERY part of this book was wonderfully written and tangibly enjoyed from the FIRST page! I am NOT a fan of pink, but I couldn't stop looking at that BEAUTIFUL cover while reading and the story never failed to keep my attention through almost 500 pages. It was such an amazing read that I even forgot to take notes! Yes, this book is FILLED with excellent food and dishes, but mostly it appeals to the reader's heart through Eleanor and the amazing character she is.

The book begins with Eleanor being a volunteer for the wounded during war in 1864 and this entire scene resonates with her in such a way that she remembers it throughout the story. She even makes a promise to one dying soldier and she doesn't give up the unlikelihood of fulfilling this promise no matter how many years it takes to do so. Most people would've given up after a few attempts, there was no one to keep her accountable and no one would've been the wiser about such a failed attempt. However, I believe this promise is one of many instances that strengthens Eleanor's faith and even brings her much needed healing about love.

Eleanor must move in with her aunt later in the story after leaving her father and his ailing mind in an asylum; the scene is powerfully written and my heart ached EXACTLY as Eleanor did in leaving her precious Papa to the hands of the capable medical staff. My heart broke even as I read that part.

I do have to say regarding Aunt Adelicia that I was surprised at how welcoming her aunt is when Eleanor moves in. I really thought the aunt would be cordial, cold, and distant, but she is quite the opposite. Even with her own agenda to guide Eleanor with, this aunt really felt like a surrogate mom in so many ways. I didn't always agree with her methods/intentions, but I respected their relationship and believed that Adelicia

was truly determined to see Eleanor entrusted in a solid arrangement. Though she was not my favorite character in the story, she did keep the plot interesting.

I have no interest in Botany or plant life, but I was taken in with Marcus's passion towards flowers and his brilliant ways of creating the perfect specimens. I didn't agree with keeping his secrets so tightly hidden, but I did understand his reasons. More than once he had my sympathies and I had no trouble falling for his character as the man for Eleanor. He really was Mr. Darcy to Eleanor's Elizabeth! (I found Eleanor very similar to Elizabeth Bennett, especially in how she enjoyed walking so much) He understood everything about her heart and endeavored to give her whatever her heart desired, it became his mission throughout to make her smile. Sigh.....

My heart melted over and over again at Eleanor's cooking for the widows and the children. Oh my, this book is so utterly touching and honoring to fallen soldiers. With the incredible descriptions, the reader feels like you're THERE with these beautiful souls that Eleanor comes to love as her own family. Mr. Stover, Naomi and Caleb, Mr. Fitch (wow to those donuts), and even Nurse Smith who takes care of Theodore.....I was amazed by the resilience of this community as they blessed Eleanor and made her dreams come true in a TOTALLY different way than she expected!

Without a doubt, Eleanor was my hero through and through! She is compassionate, diligent, fiercely independent, giving, has an amazing heart that would rival ANY royal, faithful, trustworthy, has an adorable sense of humor, utterly intelligent, hardworking, passionate for people and cooking, and always determined to do the right thing. I never ONCE saw her as plain or unappealing, she is so very tall and completely unconventional as a Southern woman, but that only made her MORE appealing and special! Seeing the world through her eyes in this novel moved me more than once and touched me more than I would've thought possible for a fictional character. This is my first read by Alexander, but I'm convinced it won't be my last. I highly recommend this book even if historical fiction is not your typical genre, it will definitely win you over and leave you smiling. Every single part of the plot was addressed, each character got their individual conclusions, and the ending to this story leaves you feeling warm all over. I'm thrilled I got the chance to review this and I'm grateful for the love found in these pages. *also included are discussion questions and a note from the author describing historical facts in the book*

I want to thank the author and Bethany House Publishers for the review copy provided. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions expressed are my own.

Loraine says

Impoverished and struggling to care for her ailing father, Eleanor arrives at Belmont Mansion, home of her aunt, Adelia Acklen, the richest woman in America--and possibly the most demanding, as well. Adelia insists on finding her niece a husband, but a simple act of kindness leads Eleanor down a far different path--building a home for destitute widows and fatherless children from the Civil War. While Eleanor knows her own heart, she also knows her aunt will never approve of this endeavor. Archduke Marcus Gottfried has come to Nashville from Austria in search of a life he determines, instead of one determined for him. Hiding his royal heritage, Marcus longs to combine his passion for nature with his expertise in architecture. But Marcus is not the man Adelia has chosen for Eleanor, and even if he were, someone who knows his secrets is about to reveal them all.

This second book in the Belmont Mansion series is set immediately after the Civil War. Alexander has an incredible gift of combining romance with historical aspects and setting. Her books never disappoint in giving a story that captures your attention from start to finish. Filled with 2 wonderful main characters, Eleanor and Marcus, and supported by so many delightful secondary characters, this story depicts the aftermath of war so well in the widows and children left behind by the men who fought and died in the War. Eleanor's care and concern for them was always at the forefront of every decision she made even when it came to love and her father. Alexander did an excellent job of portraying Eleanor's father, Theodore, and the various aspects of dementia and how it was handled during that time period. Marcus was definitely a charismatic charmer who saw beyond Eleanor's "plain exterior" to her inner beauty that in turn made him see her as a beautiful woman. I look forward to reading the rest of the Belmont Series.

FAVORITE QUOTES: "Every brick laid in the foundation of a life, however meaningfully or haphazardly placed, shaped the whole."

"Not everything has to be beautiful to be worthy of admiration..."

"She wasn't responsible for seeing to everyone's needs. That was God's responsibility. Hers was to do what He brought to her attention, what He placed in her path."

"The goodbyes here are only temporary. Someday there will be only together forever."

Lindsey (Books for Christian Girls) says

About this book:

"Eleanor Braddock, a spinster--plain, practical, no stunning Southern beauty--has long since dismissed any hope of marriage. But when a dying soldier whispers his final words, she believes her life can still have meaning and determines to find his widow. But this compassionate deed takes a harsh turn, and Eleanor finds herself dependent upon the richest woman in America and the most despised woman in Nashville--her aunt, Adelia Acklen, mistress of Belmont Mansion. A clandestine act of kindness leads Eleanor to an unlikely path for her life--building a home for destitute widows and children from the Civil War. And while Eleanor knows her own heart, she also knows her aunt will never approve.

Gerhard Marcus Gottfried, Archduke of the House of Habsburg and fourth in line to the Austrian throne, arrives in Nashville in search of a life he determines, instead of one determined for him. Collaborating with botanist Luther Burbank, Marcus seeks to combine his own passion for nature with his expertise in architecture. But his plans to incorporate natural beauty into the design of the widow's and children's home run contrary to the wishes of practical, frugal Eleanor, who sees his ideas as costly nonsense.

Yet as the construction project continues, Marcus and Eleanor find common ground--and a love neither of them expected. But Marcus is not the man Adelia has chosen for Eleanor to marry, and even if he were, someone who knows Marcus's secrets is about to reveal them all."

Series: "Belmont Mansion" book #2. Can be a stand-alone novel. (book #1, "A Lasting Impression" here!)

Spiritual Content- Prayers are said; Eleanor & Marcus have a Faith and trust the Lord in their lives.

Negative Content- In the prologue, Eleanor is a nurse and there's a bit of blood, but it's not detailed.

Sexual Content- A couple kisses (one lightly detailed)

-Eleanor Braddock

-Marcus Gottfried

P.O.V. switches between them.

471 pages (!!)

Set in 1868 (Prologue in 1864)

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Pre &amp; New Teens- Four Stars

(only because it's a large book with a pretty deep story line)

## High School Teens- Five Stars

My personal Rating- Five Stars

Reading the first book in the “Belmont Mansion” series, “A Lasting Impression” got me hooked me Miss Tamera Alexander’s writing- as soon as I finished “A Lasting Impression” I was counting down the days till the next book in the series “A Beauty So Rare”. When that day came and the mailman handed me the package...well this was my reaction:

Excited? Who, me? Maybe a LOT! ;)

Miss Tamera Alexander has put “Visit Belmont Mansion” on my Bucket List- and the way she makes you feel like you’re there I could almost check off that I’ve been there! I cannot wait till 2015 when the next book in the “Belmont Mansion” series comes out. :)

And if you're like me, I love seeing behind the scenes of how the author wrote this book:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVV1E...>

\*BFCG may (Read the review to see) recommend this book by this author. It does not mean I recommend all the books by this author.

\*I received this book for free from the Publisher for this review. (But I was going to buy it with my own

money- I was that excited about this book!)

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## **Marlene says**

I'm very behind with this review due to enjoying a wonderful Christmas season and putting my eARC reviews high on the priority list. My mother-in-law even asked me why I hadn't reviewed it yet! (I loaned her book #1 a few months ago.) So, here we go. (For those of you who regularly read my reviews, you will note a bit of a "rerun" on the bottom of this review from my review for *To Win Her Favor* about the books in this series and those of Ms. Alexander's other recent series set in the Nashville area.) Let me just say briefly that if you are likely to read the entire series, I'd recommend starting at the beginning. It isn't essential, though, as this is a standalone novel with no loose ends.

*A Beauty So Rare* (2014, Bethany House), second in the *Belmont Mansion* series by Tamera Alexander, is a historical Christian romance set in Nashville, Tennessee in 1868. I read this book because I received it as a gift, and because Ms. Alexander is one of the few authors I try to keep up with.

### **Rating: 5 stars**

**The heroine:** Eleanor Braddock, 29, has served as her father's caretaker for a few years, but is now dropping her father off to live at a rest home with a heavy heart. Her aunt, Adelia Acklen Cheatham, the mistress of Belmont Mansion, used her influence to secure a spot for Eleanor's father at the rest home, and has invited Eleanor to live at Belmont.

**The hero:** Marcus Geoffrey, 33, desires "to experience the life of the common man." So who is he, what is he doing, and why is he not a common man? He is "the Archduke Gerhard Marcus Gottfried von Habsburg", second in line to be the emperor of Austria. He has, to his frustration, been much sought after by wealthy women in his country wanting a good match. Marcus has come to America incognito, with Mrs. Cheatham as "his benefactress of sorts." Even though Marcus comes from a privileged background, he is intelligent and has aspirations in two occupations simultaneously. I found both to be very interesting.

Waiting in line at the post office, Marcus sees Eleanor. He recognizes her as the recently-arrived niece of Mrs. Cheatham. "He had no intention of pursuing her acquaintance, nor encouraging it in any way." When I went back to review my flagged quotes for writing this review, I nearly laughed at this one, because Marcus becomes very good friends with Eleanor later on.

### **Christian elements:**

\*From an early age, I've been taught to tell the truth by my parents, my church, and the Bible. I believe wholeheartedly in this, and teach the same to my children. On a purely practical level, having a reputation for consistently telling the truth (even to one's own detriment) is essential to being trustworthy. I see this upheld again and again in my daily life as a mother.

In the prologue, Eleanor deceives a patient three times in order to comfort him. As this is a Christian novel, I was taken aback by this, because I felt the deception was presented in a positive way. I have mixed feelings about this. But I've never been in the presence of a dying person, and it seems like it would be a catch-22

situation. It's tough situations like these that make me wonder what Jesus would have done. (In parenting, I very occasionally take the "I do not want to answer your question" way out. It gives me the opportunity to be honest without giving information I do not wish to share, while simultaneously guarding against feeling tempted to lie.) However, the deathbed scene was a very small portion of the story, and Eleanor's actions were obviously done with the best of intentions.

### **What I liked:**

\*I like the fact that this series is unified not only by Belmont Mansion, but also by the fact that the heroines' skills are front and center in the plot of each book. (The heroine in book one is a skilled painter, book two's heroine is a skilled cook, and the heroine in book three is a skilled musician.) These kinds of parallels make me happy. :-D

\*I think it's hilarious that the dress Eleanor wears on the cover is her hated pink (but unfortunately, best) dress! Too funny!

\*Alzheimer's disease (or something very similar) is an issue in this book, and Ms. Alexander does a remarkable job depicting the effects of it. My mind was in shock at some aspects of the disease which I had never considered before.

### **What I didn't like:**

\*I can only point to the deception issue as outlined above, which isn't enough to bring it down from five stars. As I always find with Tamera Alexander, this was a tightly woven story.

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I will definitely continue to read more of Ms. Alexander's stories. I have put *To Mend a Dream* (a novella in the *Among the Fair Magnolias* collection), on my to-read list. I recommend this book to fans of Tamera Alexander and Christian historical romance. I have no compunctions about recommending this book to teens and up.

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The timeline of the *Belle Meade Plantation* and *Belmont Mansion* series are intertwined. (They're very near each other in Nashville.) At the bottom of this review, I've listed the six books (and one novella) of the two series in what I believe to be the chronologically correct order. (*A Beauty So Rare* actually ends up being third in the sequence of seven stories.) For your convenience, see the list below.

*A Lasting Impression* , (Belmont Mansion #1, published 2011)

*To Whisper Her Name* (Belle Meade Plantation #1, published 2012)

*A Beauty So Rare* (Belmont Mansion, #2, 2014) (set in 1868)

*To Win Her Favor* , (Belle Meade Plantation #2, published 2015) (set in 1869-1870)

*To Mend a Dream* , (Belle Meade #2.5, published 2015 in *Among the Fair Magnolias* )

*A Note Yet Unsung* , (Belmont Mansion #3, 2017)

*To Wager Her Heart* , (Belle Meade Plantation #3, 2017)

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## **Tito says**

This was a pretty great read. The main characters and side characters were absolutely lovable, and this is one of the few novels where I actually really liked the female lead. Writing was solid, and the plot flowed, although I felt like the book could have been just a bit shorter. Overall really entertaining, and a great addition to the series.

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