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Harlot: The Award-winning Erotic Historical (Bartered Hearts Book 2)



Synopsis

An erotic historical romanceHE CAME HOME TO MARRY AN ANGEL...After two years of work in the gold fields of California, Caleb Hightower has come home to marry his childhood sweetheart, Jessica Willoughby. But when he returns, Caleb learns his refined bride-to-be is now a whore. Enraged by her betrayal, he can't reconcile this shameless woman with the sweet innocent he once deeply loved--but Caleb knows what to do with a harlot. He's determined to get everything from her that she's sold to other men. And he's prepared to pay for the pleasure of his revenge. BUT ALL HE FOUND WAS SIN...Left penniless after her father's death, Jess made a deal with a devil. Now she must face her first love, whose scorn is no match for her regret. To make amends, she'll let Caleb quench his rage with her body. Their bargain strips them down to searing passion and naked vulnerability, and Jess can still glimpse her loving Caleb buried deep inside this rough cowboy. In the end, an unbearable truth emerges that could push them toward forgiveness or could destroy their fragile bond forever.Note: HARLOT contains explicit sex and very graphic language.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Caleb might come back and what if he did? He wouldn't return to apologize or make amends. He wouldn't come back to court her. She was a whore. There was only one reason he might return, and he'd thrown it to her in scorn. I can pay."FINAL DECISION: Sad, thoughtful but with a message of acceptance and forgiveness, HARLOT is emotional but also sexy. Loved these characters who are survivors.THE STORY: Caleb Hightower left town two years ago to make money working in California with the intent to return to his childhood sweetheart and marry her. He returns to find out she has become a harlot. Jessica Willoughby was left penniless after the death of her father. She ended up making a deal in which she agreed to sell herself. Now that Caleb has returned, she agrees to allow him to use her body in order to purge the anger Caleb feels toward her.OPINION: I found this book compelling and heartbreaking. What I loved best about it was how the central theme is about forgiveness. But the important forgiveness is not Caleb forgiving Jessica, but Jessica forgiving herself and learning to live again rather than just exist. She learns to accept that she did the best she could even if her decisions were difficult ones.The connection between Caleb and Jessica is so strong from the beginning that there are no doubts that they love one another. The question is whether they can forgive and move forward. As the book begins, Caleb wants to hurt Jessica and Jessica wants to be hurt because of her decision to sell herself. Through their sexual relationship, however, they find out that there is something deep and true between them.As the secrets in this story are revealed, I especially liked that Caleb and Jessica are able to reconnect apart from Caleb finding out what actually happened. He loves and accepts her before the truth comes out.This is not a light read, but it is a beautiful love story.WORTH MENTIONING: I appreciated that this book took a hard, realistic look at prostitution rather than romanticizing it.CONNECTED BOOKS: HARLOT is a standalone.STAR RATING: I give this book 4.5 stars.NOTE: I received an ARC of this book via Netgalley in order to provide a review. I was not required to write a positive review. All opinions contained herein are my own.

Yesterday, I read the prequel novella to this book, Angel. It was free, and in my brief review, I said that it had done its job: I intended to read on in the series. Harlot is the next installment, and it was a fast read, and a not entirely satisfying one. At 123 pages, it's longer than a novella but not by much, and I think the brevity was part of my disappointment: there was not a lot of room for character development or anything but a pretty basic story arc.Harlot is set in the American West (Colorado) in 1875. Caleb loved Jessica, the town doctor's daughter, his whole life, but he felt he had to make something of himself before he could offer for her, so he went to California for two

years to seek his fortune in the gold rush. He came home having done so, only to find that in his absence, Jessica became the town harlot. Furious, Caleb offered her \$25 to be his whore for the week. Of course, it's clear to the reader from the start that Jessica only did what she did out of desperation, so Caleb's fury -- especially since he didn't keep himself pure in California, either -- is pretty offensive. Toward the end of the story, Jess finally points out this hypocrisy, and to his credit, Caleb gets what an ass he's been and makes a pretty good grovel, but I found it very tough to get in his corner until then. I've noticed in reading Victoria Dahl's contemporary romances that her sex scenes are often not my cuppa, and that was true here as well. A lot of Dahl's stories, as here, cater to a humiliation kink -- where the man calls the woman "slut" and other offensive names, and does things with the express intent of degrading her, and she gets off on it. I understand that that turns some peoples' crank, but to me it's like a dousing in ice water: it totally pulls me out of the scene and turns me off. So, I didn't like the smexy parts much. I was also disappointed by where Angel's protagonists, Bill and Melisande, end up. They are still together and in love, but I hoped for a happier happy ending for them. In the end, this book didn't totally work for me, but if, like me, romances with prostitute protagonists are your catnip, or if you enjoy a good grovel, you might want to check Harlot out anyway.

An erotic western historical about a shattered and hopeless young girl forced into prostitution until her only love returns and wants what she sold to other men. What started as anger and lust blossoms into forgiveness. New twist on the oldest profession.

I loved this novella, first book I've read by this author. Great characterisation and setting, loved the era and the dangerous Western edge. Very sexy but I always felt the physical scenes were put together with raw and compelling emotion. I loved that Caleb 'got over it' and got on with it, and when he brought Jess those flowers, that was just awww. A big tick too for the editor. I don't think I found a single error in this ebook, and this day and age that's a rarity.

I had a hard time with all the self-hatred in the first part of this story, but man, the rest of it is sweet reward, and the way it ends is wonderful, not pat or too easy. I was raised in the Western US, N. California, Idaho, Montana, and in school learned a lot of the history. This author did her research and integrated it very well, and that's what earned her the fifth star. Recommended.

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