

## Dreams and Misunderstandings

**Stephanie Jones**

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Ask any romance writer what is the secret to writing a compelling love story and the answer may shock you. It's not love or passion. It's not beautiful, wealthy characters or exotic locales. The secret is misunderstanding. It's only when simple misunderstanding muddies two characters' ability to see the love they share that romance readers become intrigued. Nowhere is this secret clearer than in *Dreams and Misunderstandings*, the debut novel by Stephanie Jones.

Jessie is the only daughter of a wealthy Wyoming rancher. Her parents are friends with the Prestons, neighboring ranchers who have a son, Scott, who is Jessie's age. While the two families hoped that their children would marry, it's clear that Jessie's heart belongs to Rick, the older brother of her best friend. Home for the summer from college, Jessie longs to spend her time with Rick, but the young man who is half Navajo, half English has an opportunity to spend several weeks in London with his grandfather. The young lovers separate and in London, Rick's eyes open to a whole new way of life. When Jessie has the chance to go to Paris, she meets up with Rick, but the opportunities (and the women around Rick) cause her to feel unsure of their relationship. Can the lovers stay together or will circumstances and geography drive Jessie into Scott's arms?

*Dreams and Misunderstandings* is a handsomely crafted romance. Jones' success is her ability to twist classic romantic tropes of boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl in with realistic situations. From the first scene where Jessie and Rick meet again at her eighteenth birthday party, readers feel their passion and automatically know the lovers will have to be separated for this love triangle to get interesting. But when they do, Jones does something unexpected by sending Rick to London and narrating his story first. When Rick meets Jessie again, her insecurities and insistence on saving herself for marriage—two ideas that would cause most people to root for the heroine—make the reader legitimately wonder if this relationship has a future.

The only drawback may be that some scenes suffer from too much tell and not enough show. For instance, when Jessie and Rick are together in London, Jones writes, "To Jessie he appeared to be enjoying himself and she felt her heart sink. He seemed so at home amongst these new people and there seemed to be so many attractive young women around." Jones might make this scene stronger by describing how the women look, what they are wearing, how are they acting, and how does Rick seem to react to Jessie.

But, who cares? Once the reader gets into the little things that affect the lovers in a big way, it's hard not to genuinely fret over and root for Rick and Jessie's future. That's what makes *Dreams and Misunderstandings* a delicious read—the perfect book for anyone who loves romance novels. This is the kind of story that reinforces the romance reader's ideas of love—that if all-too-human characters like Rick and Jessie can make it through misunderstanding after misunderstanding, the reader too might be able to share in their dream of love.

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