



Love Spells: A Novella

Linda Casebeer

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As she learns about love, Angelique is realistically, fallibly human, which is this story's greatest strength.

An intelligent young woman must come to terms with her troubled youth as she emerges from adolescence into adulthood. In *Love Spells*, a novella that serves as the first installment of a series, Linda Casebeer delves into the disheartening existence of an innocent girl thrust into the social-service system and processed, then turned out into the world unprepared for what psychological pain awaits. Disillusioning and sad, this story confronts the real meaning of love and parenting.

The primary focus is on Angelique, a candid protagonist who discloses her uncomfortable experiences at the hands of an incompetent mother. Botched care, implemented by knowledgeable caregivers within a so-called “safe” environment, has compounded her difficult life, making her later seek comfort in the arms of boyfriends: “It turned out both Andrew and David wanted to have sex with her, but not at the same time. That seemed okay with her. They had filled a kitchen cupboard with condoms the colors of the rainbow. And black. They always asked her what color next. David was rougher with her than Andrew. Slapped her a little. Wanted things Andrew didn’t. Would forget to kiss her.”

Desperate and uncertain of the future, Angelique places her trust in people who will not be able to provide for her or protect her from harm. Fairly well developed supporting characters enhance this realistic confessional, juxtaposing Angelique’s quest for contentment with the brutal lack of fulfillment, often due to the undependable nature of those in her personal circle.

The story’s most outstanding quality is its fallible humanity, while the greatest flaw is its rapid-fire progression into a quagmire of confusion. Contemplative and a tad obsessed with insignificant detail, a clear-cut purpose cannot be defined, for the plot is closer to a spontaneous journey rather than a structured route. This stylistic method is, of course, a reflection of real life and may have been the intended result—a natural flow of consciousness and activity to simulate reality. Preconceived plot devices are not welcome here.

Short, choppy descriptions turn into unnecessary word bricks: “He said he was going to cook an omelet. Cracked eggs. Beat them. Poured in some milk. Cut up mushrooms and put them in the pan to cook.”

An interesting cover that depicts a pensive young heroine seated alone in a dark, sequestered room near a bright window seems to allude to the book’s coming-of-age theme—one of emergence into the sunlight. Strangely, no promotional blurb appears on the back, which could be problematic in marketing this title as a self-contained entity.

Linda Casebeer is a published poet and cofounder of Serealities, a fiction site where readers can vote on the outcome of weekly, serialized stories. This collaborative effort allows for creative input outside the traditional literary norm.

Love Spells is Casebeer’s debut. The end segues into the next novella, leaving questions unanswered and obligating one to keep reading...or *controlling* the characters.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (April 14, 2014)

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