

On Love's Gentle Shore

Liz Johnson

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Liz Johnson combines a tender inspirational romance with the gritty impact of childhood abuse for a powerful story about the struggle to find, accept, and understand real love, in *On Love's Gentle Shore*.

Natalie O'Ryan vowed never to return to her hometown on Prince Edward Island—a place teeming with black memories. But her fiancé, Russell Jacobs, decides they'll hold their marriage ceremony there. When her wedding arrangements fall through and Russell leaves to handle a work emergency, she is forced to complete her ceremony planning with childhood friend and first love, Justin Kane.

Natalie must face the pain of that failed romance and of her past abuse, discovering along the way what true, healthy love is, and whether she'll find it with Russell or Jacob.

The novel does not shy from examining the profound impact of childhood abuse. Natalie wrestles with self-acceptance, and struggles with forgiveness and unhealthy relationship behaviors. Trust eludes her. These realistic and compelling issues drive the plot.

Key characters are dimensional, with true-to-life flaws, such as a caring mother who edges on meddling. Otherwise good people succumb to gossip—a key theme. Russell, unaware that he works over his fiancée's needs, still displays a kind heart. For Natalie and others, growth is a hard-fought gain that isn't tied in a tidy bow.

The plot and story line maintain momentum. Johnson often writes lyrically: "Now [the rain] came like tears, rolling down each pane with a great and solemn sadness, mimicking every tear they'd shared in this place."

Issues of abuse, neglect, and infidelity are handled sensitively. Johnson tackles two key truths head-on: help often is available for the abused, even when they can't see it, and those who want to help often face difficult barriers. Yet the novel offers hope that love, acceptance, and emotional well-being are possible, even when hard-won.

Gently inspirational, the story avoids implying that faith alone provides a simple answer. Instead, gentle allusions to the power of belief and of God form the story's foundation. *On Love's Gentle Shore* is a deeper romance read set in an very real world.

DIANE GARDNER (July/August 2017)

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