

Opal Ridge: The Opal Ridge Series Book 1

Victoria Capper

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Pride and Prejudice meets the Australian outback in this delightful, steamy romance.

A modern romance with shades of *Pride and Prejudice* set in the Australian outback? This premise works in Australian author Victoria Capper's steamy *Opal Ridge*, which tackles themes of love, family, and second chances.

When aloof, wealthy businessman Charles Carmody (a Darcy Down Under) places an ad for hired help at his ranch in the bush, he does not expect to hire feisty Jenna Mackenzie as a farmhand. Can Charles let down his guard enough for this woman "who gave as good as she got"? Or will both let misunderstandings and fear keep them apart?

As in the Austen classic, the pair spends much time jousting verbally, little time touching, and even less time declaring their true feelings to each other. As a result, the small gestures typical in romances—kisses and caresses—take on larger import here, and one turns the pages with bated breath, wondering when such a momentous scene will occur again.

The couple's prejudice against each other impedes their burgeoning love. Yet Charles and Jenna are refreshingly self-aware. When he finds himself feeling illogically enraged at Jenna because of his past experiences with women, "Charles knew that was unfair. She could hardly be blamed for what *he* felt." Ultimately, though, the supporting characters help Jenna and Charles see that they love each other, although the protagonists' actions may prevent the admission of said affections. With boosters such as Charles's kind, levelheaded dad, Tom, and Jenna's protective brother, Rick, along with the wise hermit, Bill-Bob, Charles and Jenna have mouthpieces who can say the words that they lack the courage to say to each other. It is a rare delight to find so many verbally expressive characters in one story.

The Australian outback, captured in vivid detail, also represents a character in this book. The characters' deep love for the bush emanates from the pages and helps draw the uninitiated into this unfamiliar, beautiful environment:

As usual, the kookaburras were the first to be heard, laughing in the opalescent predawn light. The galahs had been chattering for some time in the trees further up the hill where they had slept for the night, but now were raucous in their screeching. ... A lone magpie in a tree nearby greeted the day ... in liquid, melodious notes.

The sounds are so evocative and the verbs so descriptive that it does not take much work to imagine being in the land with Jenna and Charles. Along with them, bear witness to the delight and frustration kangaroos can bring, or the joy of seeing a wild koala. The use of Australian slang beyond the proverbial "G'day," and the author's description of outback culture further ground the story in reality. Non-Aussies may find a slang dictionary helpful at times, but that should not deter romance readers from this Down Under romance with tinges of Austen.

JILL ALLEN (April 7, 2015)

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