

The Weekend Wedding Assistant

Rachel Gladstone

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Just before their wedding, Julia's husband-to-be Aaron died in a freak hiking accident. Now she's a "wianceé" caught between grief and new passions. In Rachel Gladstone's frothy Southern romantic comedy, *The Weekend Wedding Assistant*, Julia zigzags toward healing.

When Julia lands a job as a wedding assistant at Whitfield Chapel—the site of her own ill-fated nuptials—her friends think it's a bad idea. But helping others brings Julia perspective and revives her belief that love is possible. Between her job's minor mayhem and a recovery process that seesaws between being wacky and touching, conflicts arise, including Julia's attraction to Aaron's best friend, Linc, who's otherwise involved.

Julia also falls for Garrett, a photojournalist, whose red flags she ignores. How the right couple eventually connects involves a series of sudden crises and breakups that unfold with convenient speed, though paying tribute to the fantasy of destined lovers.

The men in Julia's story have dreamboat looks and sparse backgrounds; her friends are savvy belles whose roles are limited to that of sounding boards. Julia's response to grief is more variegated; she goes on an over-the-top online shopping binge; has trouble sleeping; avoids clearing out Aaron's belongings; and dreams of Aaron, mining her visions for cues on how to live without him. Though Julia often reacts to situations with exclamations and frenzy, her mixed emotions are genuine.

Nashville's social scene, details about the weddings that Julia attends, and sweet interactions between Julia and her always helpful mother enrich the story. *The Weekend Wedding Assistant* is a story about figuring out who to become once you're outside of defining relationships. Julia's cheeky rules for living are laced throughout and culminate in the realization that "Miracles can happen. Miracles do happen!" It's an uplifting message that never grows old.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2020)

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