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He'd come for a reason

It had taken fifteen years for the small town of Morey's Falls, in the Montana foothills, to come to terms with a tragedy that had touched all their lives. Now, Tanner, the son of the man who had been the cause of it all, had returned. His arrival stirred up old memories, feelings . . . and for Ellie Johnson Lundquist, it changed her life.

Tanner was a loner who wanted no one's help. But Ellie looked behind the facade and found an intensity strong enough to join them together and put the past to rest, and in doing so they found themselves as well.

Blue Sage (Western Lovers: Ranch Rogues, #2) Details

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From Reader Review Blue Sage (Western Lovers: Ranch Rogues, #2) for online ebook

TINNGG says

I ponder a lot, about these characters who stay in small towns where they're miserable. I really ponder why this town continues to exist. Seems like such a tragedy in a town that barely qualifies for a truck stop (with no gas station...where do people gas up?). the kindest thing would be for the whole town to die. And of course, I wonder why something like what happened would keep being rehashed.

So basically, the past is that the H's father, a Korean war vet, had...issues...from his time there. And the H's mother, freaked out by him, left with the H, then a 2 year old. 15 years later, he snapped during the 4th of July, and shot a bunch of people. It is implied that prior to this, a bunch of animals in the area turned up dead, at his hand. The h was the lone survivor among the victims - she was shot in the knee.

The H has spent the last 15 years having people look at him suspiciously due to who his father was. I kinda puzzled at that. His almost-step-father insists that he go back to his parents' home town and well, figure things out.

The h has become, whether she wanted to or not, the town martyr. She wants out. The town judge took her in by marrying her (he's dead now), and well, everyone takes care of her...until she sleeps with the H, then they turn on her like rabid dogs. (see "why do people remain in small towns when they're miserable?"). He stays away for a bit and they sort of forgive her, deciding she's been victimized again (well, yeah - by them).

In the meantime, someone is planning on recreating the tragedy. The H's reappearance is v. convenient as everyone suspects him. The person makes their move against the h, the H for whatever reason goes back and gets her untied, then they go and avert disaster.

As stated earlier, I don't get why the h had stayed there. I don't get why she let herself get railroaded into a marriage (no relatives apparently). I don't get a lot of things about this set up really.

Sanya says

A total waste of time.

Brenda Margriet says

Interesting premise...the son of a mass murderer returns to town and falls in love with the sole survivor of the massacre.

Hero seemed rather angst-y for only being 2 years old when his mother left his father and not even living in the town when the massacre took place. But I loved that he goes "walk-about" (if he were Australian).

I thought the heroine was an interesting take on a survivor. She became the town's 'saint', good luck charm,

whatever. The town cannot move on...but she needs to.

MBR says

Charles Tanner, Jr. is returning to his hometown. It would be an understatement to say that he is not looking forward to the “homecoming”. If Tanner were to have his way, he would never have made the journey, but then for the man who had been the father figure he never had, he would return to his place of origin, even if it means facing the demons left behind by his father.

Tanner’s father is a legend for all the wrong reasons. Known as a vet who had gone on a killing spree murdering sixteen and wounding one before turning the gun on himself, Tanner knows that he is going to end up stirring some bad memories for a lot of families who had lost loved ones.

What Tanner doesn’t expect to happen is to come across the all too beguiling Eleanor Johnson Lundquist, the almost 31 year old widow, and the lone survivor among the victims of the massacre at the hands of Tanner’s father. Tanner catches Eleanor during one of those rare moments in which she lets her uninhibited self roam freely; something that is not too easy given her revered status in the close-knit community that is Morey’s Falls.

With the anniversary of that fateful day coming, Tanner’s arrival undoubtedly stirs someone to once again force members of the town to relive the nightmares. With everyone on the edge, it is all too easy to paint Tanner as the bad guy. But within Eleanor, there is an altogether a different kind of storm brewing. For the very first time in her 30 plus years, Eleanor feels the stirrings of lust and desire, to take and be taken, and scandalously enough, by none other than Tanner himself.

As Eleanor and Tanner spends more time together amidst Tanner’s pursuit for the truth, they discover elements and facets to each other’s characters which otherwise would have remained uncovered. Each layer as it is peeled back, exposes a side that appeals to the other more. Tanner who has a habit of leaving, the itch that possesses him to go roaming and not stay put, finds himself with an inexplicable need for the very first time in his life to stay.

Blue Sage was a pleasant surprise because of the depth of the story that Anne Stuart delivered. Harlequin titles are not often known for the depth in their stories, but mostly quick reads that gives you a much needed escape. But somehow, Anne Stuart even then, managed to deliver books that were close to perfection with her ability to present to readers characters that seem polar opposites of one another, and yet form this bond around an almost indiscernible connection that springs to life from the get-go.

I loved both Tanner and Eleanor. Tanner with his lean whipcord physique, who believes that his pursuit of the truth comes from an innate responsibility towards the only man he looks up to, when it comes from a need within himself as well, to understand the man who had sired him, and a community that had failed all of them with their inability to see an unstable character for what he was, until it was too late.

I actually did think that there would be more to Tanner’s father’s story, but it didn’t turn out that way. Nevertheless, the whole aspect of a reemerging menace from within the community, with history repeating itself was a captivating aspect of the story.

I loved Eleanor as well. That inner vulnerability, core of strength, and the fact that she does identify with the

fact that she is drowning on the pedestal that Morey's Falls has put her on, to the way she blossoms under the touch of Tanner; the sensual awakening that is slow, hard and fast at the same time, were all parts of her story that I adored.

I loved the scene in the moonlight, up in the hills, with just Tanner and Eleanor – that was as elemental as it could get, and it somehow seemed fitting when it came to both of them.

The ending definitely made me teary-eyed. Tanner's need to walk-about which hits his restless spirit and how it all played out was apt. Recommended for fans of contemporary romances with suspense in the mix.

Final Verdict: Blue Sage is magical and uncanny in equal doses; Anne Stuart waves her magic wand and creates characters that leaps off the pages, taking you for a ride you would never forget anytime soon!

Rating = 4.25/5

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Karla says

There are some authors I can't stop reading, even though I don't like their stuff and usually want to bang my head against a brick wall the entire time. They're kryptonite *and* catnip, sapping my ~~will to live~~ energy while at the same time being something I absolutely have to read.

(Also see: Johanna Lindsey)

If that makes me an irrational hater, so be it.

By now, after a few nutty little tomes by one Anne Stuart, I should realize that I'm not ever going to get anything subtle. Stuart writes with the Ham-Handed Hammer of Foreshadowing, the Dull Machete of Emotional Nuance, and the Spastic Chainsaw of Premise. For lack of a better term, I'm calling her stuff Woobie Noir. Her characters are tough and hard-boiled, but they're nothing but Cadbury egg cream on the inside. She goes for effect and the reader's gut - I'll give her that much - but the pieces usually don't fit or flow, and the story becomes a cobbling together of snarling "damaged" characters who growl and hump. And the final scenes have always been a hot mess as the wheels come off the plot wagon.

So I usually finish her books feeling more brain-damaged than when I began. Yet I can't stop.

But enough about my issues...

Stuart whips out her chainsaw with the setting of Morey's Falls, Montana, a small town east of Buttfucknowhere that, a decade ago, was the grisly locale of a mass shooting by a war vet who snapped and opened fire on a July 4th celebration. 16 people died, and there isn't a person in town who didn't lose a friend or family member in the massacre. In the intervening years, there hasn't been one day that it hasn't been talked about. **Everyone talks about it every single day.** Central to this obsessive grieving process is Ellie Johnson, the sole survivor of the shooting, who sort of got communally adopted by the entire town when she was left an orphan. Going beyond that, she is practically "owned" by the town and made a terminal victim

and living memorial to that awful day.

In a totally bizarre case of ~~convenient grounds for future misunderstanding with the hero~~ getting shit done in a crisis, the town deemed it easier to have the orphaned Ellie marry the old widowed Judge Lundquist than go through the adoption process because a marriage of convenience would be a faster way to get her taken care of.

So when the book opens, Ellie is a 30-something virgin widow who wears floppy flannel nightgowns like the Judge's dead first wife and hobbles around with a cane because her knee got blown out by the expert marksman who knew how to kill his targets with one shot. (Huh, whut?)

Anyway, Ellie's out riding the prairie bare-breasted (because that's what virgin widows did in 1987 Montana) and encounters Tanner, the son of the shooter, who has come back to Morey's Falls for an anniversary reckoning. Of course the first thing Ellie does after realizing who Tanner's related to is check out his muscles and package. She then ferries him around town as he goes out of his way to tell everyone just who he is and berates Ellie every other page for using her cane when she doesn't need it, since she only limps when she remembers to. (She's FINE, get it? It's the town keeping her down! She's on the victim pedestal and lurveing it!)

Of course Tanner is feeling sudden pangs of love and monogamy for the first time in his life, and the blowsy blond town slut (usually his type) suddenly holds no attraction. Ellie and Tanner drink a lot of coffee and needle each other and beat up themselves and tell each other to stop it. This happens for pages on end.

Then the farm animals and local pet dogs start getting killed.

Oh look, it's The Mystery poking its head into the proceedings! Yes, there's a bad guy on the loose, hanging outside Ellie's bathroom window and grinding up ciggy butts **just like the shooter used to do**. Cue the talk about "Is the shooter really dead? Is the son mimicing his dad's schtick to revenge himself on the town?" and even the hero sucks up pages asking himself if he's doing it in his sleep. (I shit you not.)

I'll 'fess up at this point and say that Stuart pulled a fast one on me. I didn't correctly guess who the killer/stalker was because I was approaching the mystery with a bit of logic and Stuart opted to throw some crazy shit at the wall instead. She got me there. (view spoiler) I shouldn't have been surprised that Stuart pissed the mystery and tension aspect down her leg. She hasn't failed yet in that department.

Naturally Tanner redeems himself in the eyes of the town, as he thwarts the new shooter at the very last second and a whole decade of deep-rooted psychosis and hatred is washed away in a community group hug.

And garnish with an Epilogue sprinkled with kittens of Pregnancy, Secondary Character Romance, and Eternal Domesticity.

So what with the utterly ham-handed set-up with characters damaged for its own sake (the twauma and damage really got thrown around willy-nilly simply for effect) and a town psychology that probably hasn't ever existed on this earth, combined with a plot that - when the mystery is taken out - is little more than a series of arguments and clichéd tough dialogue interspersed with rock-hard groins, I didn't **hate** it, but it was still a definite miss.

Lizzie says

Such a typical Anne Stuart, with a thirty-something virgin heroine and a traumatized, self-loathing loner of a hero. I was intrigued by the premise, but Stuart does very little with it, using the town's trauma of a long-ago mass shooting as backdrop for the otherwise predictable gyrations between her leads.

Alexis-Morgan Roark says

Wow...this little book packs one emotional punch! I knew it was going to be an emotional ride going in, but I was not prepared for it all. I know. I am a big old softie, but this one just disturbed me. It's that side of crime that you never allow yourself to think about: the family of the perpetrators of violent crime.

I am a better person for having read this little book...I know that sounds maudlin, and I can be that at times, but it is true. There was some much judgement in this book, so much bitterness and anger and pain.

There was also hope...it was disguised but it was there. You knew the heroine was planning to leave anyway, but I wonder if she would have without the hero's eventual love. Would she have been strong enough to get off of her "pedastal" and become human? I doubt it.

Ok. I am depressing myself now. It was emo, yes, but it was also fun at times, a little bit of angst in the form of the heroine's best friend (witch!) and some surprising twists: heart warming and violent throughout.

Lynsey A says

I did like this book. It was a good story. It didn't blow me away but I enjoyed reading it.

Saly says

3.5 stars

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

In Blue Sage, Anne Stuart poses the question, "Could you fall in love with the son of the man who murdered your parents and several other people, and maimed you for life?" And she answers it beautifully.

This is a very tough situation, and you would think that it would be way too dark to tackle in a series romance, but Ms. Stuart really does a great job with this plot. From the beginning you can see the struggle that Charles Tanner, Jr. (who goes by Tanner) has had, trying to deal with the fact that his father was a mass-murderer. He has faced prejudice because of it, even though he did nothing to earn it. This story reminds me

a little of the Paul Newman movie "The Long Hot Summer" in how Ben Quick has to deal with his father's reputation as a despicable barn burner.

Ellie is an interesting character. She has been made into a living martyr by the town because she was the only survivor of the massacre. She basically has no identity outside of that, and is living a half-life but is afraid to have any goals or aspirations outside of this. When Tanner comes back to town, she is actually nicer to him than pretty much everyone else, even though she has the most reason to hate him. I believe that Ellie just wanted to get past what happen and move on, but the town wouldn't let her.

Tanner has an outcast personality, with good reason. He doesn't take crap from anyone, and says exactly what he thinks. He doesn't treat Ellie like a plaster saint. He says things that are designed to provoke her, in fact. Tanner succeeds very well in waking Ellie up out of the coma she's living in. His fearlessness inspires Ellie to become her own person and take what she wants out of life. Their relationship is a passionate and eventually loving one, but not smooth-sailing. But seeing these two characters who have so many reasons not to be together find solace, acceptance, and love, is a message that touches me. This is definitely one of her more serious category romances, but well worth the read.

natasha k says

As always when you start reading Anne Stuart you know what you are in for: Dark, handsome hero and a usually, less attractive heroine to match. I chose to read *Blue Sage* because the storyline was intriguing. The son of the man who killed 16 people returns to where it all happened fifteen years later to find answers to the questions that haunt him. When he gets there he meets the town saint, Ellie, the only survivor from the incident, a widow who spends day in and day out reliving the past, with scars both inside and out. Tanner sparks her interest in more ways than one and he is taken by her as well. He knows that he's not welcome but decides to stay until he gets what he wants. As with any other Anne Stuart book the story has momentum and depth, the characters all well developed and of course the underlying romantic interest is ever present between the two protagonists, gradually evolving as the story goes on. Two things bothered me with this book. First, the heroine was a thirty year old virgin with no sex drive whatsoever all these years and suddenly the son of the man who left her crippled appears fifteen years later and she goes to bed with him. Good for her and here here but what had she been doing for thirty years??? Second thing was near the end when they had decided to spend the rest of their lives together he up and leaves because he wants to make sure that he can finally settle down and start a family. Grow some balls and be a man Mr, she's having your baby. I was thinking of giving the book two stars but then i thought it's Anne Stuart we're talking about here. So, three stars but i expected more.

Janet says

More a 3 1/2 stars -- only because there are category Stuarts that I like even more than *Blue Sage**.

Anne Stuart, for me, is a series author, or should I say she was. I always have a Stuart in my TBR because she was so prolific (still is, really) and wrote book after book for HQ back in the day. Her heroes haven't changed much over the decades. They're competent, taciturn, good looking, and do they ever have to ask a woman twice to join them? Nope.

Often the conflict is in the man's head. So it is with *Blue Sage* because altho there is a mystery to clear up, the hero has to come to grips with the devastation his father caused years ago (his father killed 16 townspeople -- altho it's not stated, clearly he suffered from undiagnosed PTSD) and a crippled woman has to embrace a life full of passion and promise, and uncertainty, there's more to the HEA. With Stuart, even after the couple acknowledges that they love each other, often the hero is reluctant to totally leave his solo operator status behind. Tanner has literally walked his way across America in an attempt to flee and come to grips with his father's legacy and even after he and Ellie are married, he feels that compulsion to walk away again.

When a Stuart hero finally succumbs to love, you know it's forever because it's never an easy journey to get there.

* The title is so apt: Stuart has a marvelous sense of place and her descriptions are not just visual, you can smell the sage and the wood smoke and hear water and horses hooves.

Dina says

This book has an interesting and unique premise. Charles Tanner, Sr. was a war veteran who, suffering from PTSD, went ballistic one day, killed sixteen innocent people and badly wounded a young girl, and then killed himself. Fifteen years later, his son Charles Tanner, Jr. comes back to Morey's Fall, the small town his father almost destroyed. He and his mother had been long gone when his father went nuts but, bearing the same name as his father, Tanner had to live with the burden of his father's doings all his life and it's high time he tried to understand the reasons behind his father's killing spree and, maybe, get some sense in his own life. Naturally, the 1st person Tanner meets when he reaches Morey's Fall is Ellie Lundquist, who happens to be the young girl who survived his father's massacre. And from this moment on, there's no turning back for either of them...

What can I say about this book? I *loved* it! It wasn't a "nice and cozy" read - not that I expected it to be, with a premise like that - but it grabbed me from the start and I found myself rooting for Tanner and Ellie. They were both wounded, in different ways, by what had happened fifteen years in the past, and it was only fitting they would help each other heal and move on. Granted, Tanner was downright cruel to Ellie a couple of times and I even flinched at his harsh words, but I understood why he did it and, in the end, it was for her own good. Simply put, he wasn't going to let her keep her martyr/victim act any longer. Enough was enough, and she needed to snap out of it! And so she did. :)

The mystery/suspense part of the story kept me guessing till the end. I wasn't surprised by the villain's identity, but I admit it wasn't who I was betting on. I never think it's the most obvious choice but, in this case, it was. I have nothing to complain, though. As usual, Mrs. Stuart's writing was compelling enough to keep me glued to the pages.

This was "only" my seventh book by Mrs. Stuart, and I'm happy to say it's another winner. A must-read, IMHO.

Marianne says

I like early Anne Stuart books, and Blue Sage had all the elements that I enjoy. Ellie was likable, Tanner was frustrating but had his moments, and the suspense was well done. I think Stuart tackled a very difficult subject, and she handled it well. I was also happy that the final moments were not too drawn out. The epilogue was rather sweet too.

Crista says

This is another good one by Anne Stuart. She can think of the most interesting and unique plot lines and characters of any romance author I've ever read. This one is no exception.

Charles Tanner was a war veteran who came home a "different" man. Changed by all the death and violence he saw during the war, he was a victim of post traumatic stress syndrome. One day this "war hero" lost it and went on a shooting spree killing 16 innocent people and badly wounding a young girl. He then killed himself.

His son, also named Charles Tanner, has come back to the town in which his father unleashed his fury. He's come back to bury old ghosts and try to understand why his father did what he did. The girl who was the lone survivor of the shooting is now a woman who offers to help Tanner with his search for answers. She becomes his friend and of course..so much more!

I liked this book. Ellie is a survivor, but she is also "stuck" in the past. Tanner pushes her to move on and believes in her. Both have to come to terms with the hand that life has dealt them, but there is a certain amount of fate and destiny in this story. I enjoyed it very much.
