



Family by Design

Heather Justesen

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Tucker and Rena have been "just friends" for years. But when Tucker becomes guardian of his newly orphaned niece and nephew, he asks Rena for a huge favor to marry him. Saying yes would mean sacrificing all of Rena's romantic notions, but it might be worth it to finally have an eternal family of her very own.

Family by Design Details

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C.k. Bryant says

I loved this book! No big surprise. This isn't the first book by Heather Justesen that I've loved and I'm sure it won't be the last. The thing that made this book touch my heart was the military aspect of it. It brought a lot of emotions to the surface because my dad was in the army and served two tours in Viet Nam. I remember what my mother went through every day, not knowing if he was dead or alive, so the feelings Rena went through in this story were portrayed realistically in my opinion.

I also loved the Tucker, although I wanted to smack him a couple of times for not telling her he loved her before he did. Man, Rena went through a lot waiting for this guy to speak his mind. But she hung in there to the end and, even though they went through more than any couple should have to endure, it was all worth it.

I want to thank Heather for keeping me up nights. I had a hard time finding little snippets of time during the day to read this book, but it was always on my mind. I have it on my Kindle, so would carry it everywhere, but still struggled with finding a quiet moment to read it. More than once, I woke in the middle of the night and reached for my iPhone to read on the little screen until my eyes wouldn't stay open any longer.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who's looking for a great LDS romance to keep them up all night. Oh, and bring a box of tissues. You'll need them.

Andrea says

This book was just ok for me. I liked Rena for the most part, and I liked Tucker at times, but overall I was very frustrated with both of them for not communicating. They've been best friends for 10 years and suddenly they can't talk about what is most important. I do get that feelings would change somewhat with the rushed marriage of convenience, but the lack of communication didn't seem to fit either character. And Rena's huge issue of not knowing if Tucker loves her or not made me question why she slept with him.

Tamera Westhoff says

I LOVED it! I'm so glad that I paid full price for it (even though I love a good sale)! Luckily I got the companion novella for free and that helped my bargain-conscious mind. Anyway, on to the book! Rena is the epitome of the older than 30 Single Adult who is dying to have a family and desperately wants to find Mr. Right. She is dating someone, but there's no spark. She still considers him, because she is starting to feel desperate. On the other hand, Tucker is her best friend and has a LOT going on! His brother and sister-in-law die in a car accident, telling him that they want him to get their two kiddos, but as a Marine and businessman, it is a concern to the Social worker. Tucker comes up with a great plan to propose marriage to Rena, since they are best friends, get along great, and obviously they are both sadly single. Rena starts to consider it, but when he kisses her, her doubts fade pretty fast. So, she says yes and they have about two

weeks to plan a small wedding. In the midst of it all, the kids and their Great Aunt get into a car accident and the kids are fine, but she's stuck in the hospital for awhile. Then they have to work, plan a wedding and take care of two kids. Chaos ensues. Poor Rena is suffering through all of these random mistakes at work (turns out they aren't her mistakes), and has to fix things in the midst of the hurried preparations. They get married in the Temple (Aaahhhh...) and start working on progressing from friends to spouses to find...Du duh dum...To be continued when you read the book. It's great! I promise! You will laugh, cry, and feel their pain and joy! P.S. Heather if you read this, I want to know what happens next! I read the novella to hear about Chelsea, but what about what happens in ten years. How does she handle mommydom with her awesome interior design work? I'm curious!

Katie W says

I'm a sucker for a story of a marriage of convenience. Unlike most of them, this one happened to be modern day, which was a lot of fun.

Rena and Tucker have been friends for 10 years, but haven't ever dated one another. Tucker's circumstances change when his brother and sister-in-law are killed in an accident and he becomes guardian to their two children. He's a Marine and could be called up at any time. He desperately asks Rena to marry him, completely taking her off guard. Could a marriage really work between the two of them--could they actually be happy?

I loved the characters--the insecurities, flaws, strengths, and all. I thought the story flowed well and completely drew me in. Marriage is tough and takes some sacrifice and adjustment and it was fun to see this couple go through that.

Jenni C says

I really enjoyed the beginning (only the beginning), but it did not progress or end as I had expected.

I admired Rena (the main character's) courage and fortitude, but I felt weird that certain "events" happened before certain "words" were said between her and Tucker (the man she must marry to help raise his niece and nephew).

The attempt to write a story with this plot was bold and interesting, but the story shifts and the basic plot is covered over with Rena's daily life. I kept wondering when the main story would become the focus again and was disappointed.

This was not a bad story,... but I would not recommend it. "If I wrote this story..." is all I can think about in changing it.

Lucinda says

I've come across a lot of 'boy/girl best friends get married' stories lately but this one is by far the best. It's very well developed, the storyline flows naturally and the characters are real and engaging. Rena and Tucker's relationship attracted me and let me engross quickly in the story. We're a military family so the deployment struck a nerve with me. The reason why I docked a star (or 1/2 a star) is because of the ending: I felt like it was wrapped up too quickly. I would have liked to see that part stretch for another page, or, at least, a few more paragraphs, and see Tucker and Rena say more to each other about their feelings, especially after being apart for so long, and after everything that happened. But with a baby and 2 kids sleeping close by, I can't blame them for 'more action, less words'! Even though a few more kisses and embraces wouldn't have hurt either! ;)

Julie says

Family by Design by Heather Justesen piqued my interest from the very beginning. The heroine, Rena, was so easy to identify with, searching for love, dealing with tragedy, trying to find her way in the world. She's leaned on her best friend for years and once you meet him you can understand why.

Yeah, I loved Tucker, the best friend and hero.

I loved Tucker because he was willing to be vulnerable and flawed. I've read several books recently and watched a movie where the hero was just too perfect. Good-looking, great job, personality of a prince---all he needed was the "S" on his shirt. But that isn't reality and it takes me out of the story. Family by Design had a hero that was real and faced with difficult decisions, (but was still good-looking with a great job).

The first half of the book was so well-written I couldn't read it fast enough. The romance was the kind that brings to life the butterflies in your stomach and makes you sigh and re-read the last paragraph because it was so good. The last half was harder because the plot becomes front and center and the romance takes a back seat, so that slowed the pacing down a bit. That said, it was a good ending, which I was glad about, since there were a few ways it could have gone.

So, my final verdict is, if you want a great rainy afternoon read, Family by Design is for you.

Originally reviewed on <http://ldswritermom.blogspot.com>

Kathy * Bookworm Nation says

This ended up being different than I was expecting. I thought it was a nice read, but was a little disappointed since I was expecting more of a romance chick-lit type read. Tucker and Rena have been "just friends" for ten years. When his brother passes away he takes custody of his niece and nephew. Not wanting to raise them alone he asks Rena to marry him. So, I guess I was expecting to be a bigger part of their new relationship. I wanted to see them as newlyweds and how they handle the insta-family. Instead, Tucker is deployed pretty much right after they wed and practically disappears from the story. The story then focuses

more on Rena, her adjustments at being a new mom and a lot of focus on her work.

I appreciate that the author wanted to keep the book clean, however I think intimacy between the two would have been a big adjustment and not something to gloss over. I mean it was barely hinted at that they had even become intimate. In fact, when Rena finds out she is pregnant I was almost as shocked as she was. I just thought their relationship was odd. I didn't feel them click, and I guess it's because I never got to see them together. I never got to see them court each other and really fall in love.

So, it was just an okay read for me. I would probably enjoy it more the second time around knowing what to expect.

Content: Clean

Similar Reads: Christopher and Jaime

Erin says

This book was pretty cute. The romance was really well developed, compared to the 'turn the page and suddenly they're in love' phenomenon I see in so many other books. :/

I didn't actually finish it, because Tucker's military deployment, which left Rena a pregnant single mother taking care of two kids that aren't even hers, made it hard to get through. Actually I was feeling a little depressed to read through the hard times the family went through, and it was hard to see Rena go through all those troubles and frustrations, not to mention... PREGNANCY, alone. So I just skimmed to see what happened in the next 80 pages or so because this story was really messing with my emotions.

Reading this did make me appreciate all those men/women who serve in the military though. Wow. They sacrifice so much to protect our rights. THANK YOU!!!

Nicola says

I won this book in a First Reads Giveaway.

I really enjoyed this story. Justesen was able to create characters that were very likeable, and believable. They developed and grew as the story did - just as would occur naturally when a new family is created under any circumstances.

The feel good part of this story brought it up to a 4 for me.

Rena and Tucker took their 10 year friendship to new heights when the children needed to be rescued. Everything they did was for the good of the children, but it was the right thing to do for them as well. Their solid bond of friendship gave them the base, but apparently the feelings were stronger on both their parts than they ever realized. Justesen showed that good things happen to good people - Tucker may have been wounded, and Rena may have been alone, but they grew into a loving and beautiful family, much stronger for all their hardships.

Definitely will look for Justesen again! Thanks for a good read!

Kathryn says

loved this book. it was enough romance, suspense in not knowing the outcome, and realistic. Rena is in her 30's and still not married. She dates, but the guys are just passable and don't cause the fluttering and stars in her eyes. She does have a best friend who is a guy, Tucker that she has known for 10 years. He, Tucker, is a marine, which means he is in excellent condition, he's handsome and reliable, but if there hadn't been any romance in 10 years, then it was believed it wasn't meant to be.

Then circumstances changed. Tucker's brother and sister-in-law were in a fatal accident leaving their two children, Mckenzie (4), and Derek (6) orphans. Before his brother died, he asked Tucker to take care of his kids. The problem is the social worker is worried about a support system in place in case Tucker gets called up for deployment. Tucker prays about marrying Rena because she wants to be married and have children of her own and he does love her and know her better than anyone. When she accepts and they plan a rush marriage.

there is inner struggle with juggling work and juggling the kids schedules, but things work out. Then Tucker does get called up and the kids and Rena have to make adjustments along with the growing life of a new baby to arrive while tucker's gone.

Rena's also having unexplainable mistakes happen at work and she tries to find the person responsible before the mistakes ruin her reputation as a interior designer.

Tucker gets hurt while at war and gets sent home and he tells rena that she won't have to worry about another deployment because he was being discharged.

Rena finally gets her desire to have tucker tell her he loves her.

Jessica says

This was almost two stars. I suppose I shouldn't have focused so much on such a minor part, but I could not get over how much the author vilified the teacher in the story. It really bothers me that there is this perception of teachers out there. I am an educator and have worked in education for the past 7 years and I have never once come across a teacher who would act the way Derek's teacher acted. She kept threatening him with the "remedial" class, and that he should be in a self contained room. I don't think the author has a clear idea of how education works. Did she mean Special Ed? If she's going have interactions with teachers and education in her book she should do her research, and get it right.

Otherwise it was a cute story. I wish the main characters and had more time together to interact and realize how their friendship had turned into something more. And I wanted to see more of them trying to figure out how to be married. The kids were great. It was a decent read.

Linnae says

Rena and Tucker have been best friends for years, but have never dated. Then Tucker receives custody of his niece and nephew, after a terrible accident which leaves them orphans. Their caseworker is quite concerned that he will not be able to give them the care they need with his demanding work schedule. He says he and his girlfriend have talked about getting married. Um...that would be Rena (not actually his girlfriend), and they have talked about getting married, just never to each other. Yeah.

When he proposes, Rena doesn't know what to think. It seems like a shaky foundation for a marriage--just

getting hitched to care for the kids. Noble, but shaky. But it feels right, so she goes ahead with it. Then, like in real life, complications start cropping up and up and up. Can this marriage survive?!

A different twist on the marriage of convenience--I guess this would be more like the marriage of inconvenience! Even though you know going in that Rena and Tucker are going to fall truly, madly, deeply in love (because that's just the kind of book this is), there was some unexpected depth to the story as various challenges came up. I liked that all was not just smooth sailing. The problems were realistic and well-handled.

Heather says

Ahem. I'm not actually sure I should admit I read this, but I just realized that I only read (or at least wrote about) three books in the last year, which is pitiful, even for someone with baby twins.

I am ambivalent about being taken for a ride by this kind of fluffy romance that needed better editing. In some ways it is fun to just read a clean love story (so clean the pregnancy might surprise the reader as well as the protagonist) with a quick pace, but it also felt more than a little contrived and not nearly well-crafted enough to really recommend. But hey, if you're interested, I've got a copy I'm willing to pass along!

Nanci says

This book about best friends who marry to help two struggling children who lost their parents was to me very strong. It is a book that is written by an author that is LDS and her characters are also of that religion but the book is not preachy in that regard and the romance is sweet, and strong and does not have the gag factor, in my opinion. The difficulty of single parenting while the spouse is away fighting the war is touching. I really thought this was well written and I plan to look into more of the books of this author.
