



Hold Me

Courtney Milan

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Jay na Thalang is a demanding, driven genius. He doesn't know how to stop or even slow down. The instant he lays eyes on Maria Lopez, he knows that she is a sexy distraction he can't afford. He's done his best to keep her at arm's length, and he's succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

Maria has always been cautious. Now that her once-tiny, apocalypse-centered blog is hitting the mainstream, she's even more careful about preserving her online anonymity. She hasn't sent so much as a picture to the commenter she's interacted with for eighteen months—not even after emails, hour-long chats, and a friendship that is slowly turning into more. Maybe one day, they'll meet and see what happens.

But unbeknownst to them both, Jay is Maria's commenter. They've already met. They already hate each other. And two determined enemies are about to discover that they've been secretly falling in love...

Hold Me Details

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From Reader Review Hold Me for online ebook

Baba says

[transgender. (hide spoiler)]

Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

2.5 stars

Okay, I have a LOT of thoughts and feelings about this book.

Courtney Milan is one of my favorite authors, and I try to read everything that she writes. Hold Me was my first contemporary romance from her, and my lukewarm take on it was... unexpected. No, I shouldn't say that I feel lukewarm about it because I'm bursting with opinions! Honestly, this review is a little bit of expectations vs. reality, because I love Courtney Milan so much. **I'm devastated that I didn't love this one.**

Note: I'm going to review this book very honestly. My review may contain minor spoilers. This book contains a lot of sensitive material, and I will try and be supremely respectful of that.

First, I'll start off with the good aspects of the story. I really liked that Courtney Milan wrote something that we don't often see in romance. We have a **SUPER diverse cast of characters**, including a Latina female MC, a Chinese/Thai male MC with a Buddhist dad and a Muslim mom, and that is just the *main characters*. The supporting cast spans a huge range of POC, and that isn't even including the expanse of the sexuality spectrum that is represented. Also, we don't often see Asian men portrayed as "hot" in romance, which they absolutely are, so I was really happy about that.

I loved that the author also made a **female MC in the sciences** without representing her as the "typical geek." She is a girly girl, pretty and polished, but she can talk tech and numbers with the best of them. There was a lot of positive representation, and I appreciated that.

I also liked the banter between the two MCs in their texting relationship. It felt... natural, organic, and had some humor in a book that took itself very seriously. It was a **welcome bit of lightness**, and **it was the only time that I felt any real chemistry between the MCs.**

Now, onto my issues. I'll start with the romance, which was a stumbling block for me. I didn't like the relationship between the two MCs for the vast majority of the story. In fact, I struggled with their relationship throughout the whole book. Maria and Jay acted so **bratty and childish** with each other. I mean, come ON, people. These two were adults, out of their early 20s, and they were constantly at each other's throats. Their petty arguing bothered me, and I felt **genuine animosity** there, not something that could be overcome in an easy manner.

Much of their relationship development didn't happen face-to-face, and I thought that when they finally did get together, their online relationship didn't translate very well to real life. I also don't like when a lot of intimacy happens before the MCs are introduced to the readers, and Maria and Jay had been messaging for years. Their flirting and dynamic was already established, but the problem is that **I didn't buy into it.**

Aside from the romance itself, **I had some other issues, ones that are a bit... sticky to go into.** I want to say again, I'm a white, Jewish, cis-gendered girl, so I'm going to try to muddle through my feelings without being... wrong. **Warning: I may ramble.**

(view spoiler)

I've loved when Courtney Milan has included some diverse side characters in the past, especially in her historical romance, The Heiress Effect, with the romance between an Indian man and a Caucasian lady. I felt like that story was beautifully told, and even though it didn't have a ton of page time, it made the book 4.5-stars for me. I was expecting greatness with this one too.

I have a lot of mixed feelings about this story, and I don't think this is Courtney Milan's best work. For me, **the romance was too forced-feeling and the pace was too slow,** something I usually have NO issue with in Courtney Milan's stories. I really wanted to love this one because of the level of positive representation and the amount of diversity, but I was honestly underwhelmed. I'm so sad about that, because I really and truly love Courtney Milan.

Copy provided in exchange for an honest review

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

[Instagram](#) || [Twitter](#) || [Facebook](#) || [Amazon](#) || [Pinterest](#)

I read this book for the Unapologetic Romance Readers' New Years 2017 Reading Challenge. For more info about what this is, [click here](#).

HOLD ME isn't just the smartest romance you'll read; it's also an ode to the Bay Area. Like a modern-day PRIDE AND PREJUDICE set in Berkeley, CA, HOLD ME is about two characters who initially dislike each other intensely because of a misunderstanding and/or misplaced sense of pride, only to realize that they're practically perfect for each other and/or soul mates. I love PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and enemies-to-lovers

plot lines, so obviously this was like crack candy to my inner-book-addict.

Maria is a transgender woman of color who enjoys dressing up to the nines. She's a little ditzy and fun, and reminded me of a Latina Elle Woods (from *Legally Blonde*). Her outfits are just as cool, too. She has a secret though: she's a crazy smart blogger who's become famous for her brainy, witty blog about pop science and nobody knows her real identity but assumes she's some bigwig *male* scientist/researcher/thinktank worker, not even entertaining the idea that she's a female undergraduate.

Jay, on the other hand, is a Chinese/Thai professor who spends all his time in a lab. He's close friends with Maria's brother, but ends up insulting Maria by assuming that she's some airheaded moron who's trying to get into his lab for brownie points. He doesn't realize that he's met Maria before; he's a devoted follower of her science blog and has been chatting with her for years under the name Actual Physicist. The reader gets to watch their virtual relationship develop even as their dislike for each other increases in real life, wondering all the while, **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEIR PATHS DIVERGE?** Because you know they will. Jay was just as fascinating to me as Maria. He has a lot of issues under his belt, but he's also quite prejudiced, and one of the things about him that Maria likes the least is his assumption that pretty woman = stupid woman.

I love, love, loved this book. I loved the diversity - the Bay Area *is* diverse, and Milan really shows that to great effect in *HOLD ME*, and in a way that feels totally realistic and dimensional and not like someone ticking off a diversity checklist. I loved Maria and Jay's backstories. I loved how Maria was transgender without her transgender identity being the focus of the story. I loved that Jay was bisexual and we hear about his past relationships with men *and* women. I loved the relationships. I loved the descriptions of San Francisco, Berkeley, and BART. It's true, there only are a few cities where you can go and have like four different noodle places to one block.

Courtney Milan is a good writer. I knew that. But sometimes her historical novels are a little too vanilla for me. Not in, like, the sex way, but in the sense that they're just pleasant and inoffensive and a little bland. I always enjoy them, but few are particularly memorable. *HOLD ME*, by contrast, was like a rainbow firecracker going off in a dark sky. This book made me giggle. It also made me cry. It gave me all the feels. When I finished the book I wanted to scream giddily and dance around to Hoku's "Perfect Day" a la *Legally Blonde* in honor of Maria's adorably girly-girl personality.

This book took everything I love about myself, my friends, and my home, and turned it into something magical and wonderful.

Read it!

5 stars!

XxTainaxX says

While I respect all the time and energy that went into writing this well researched title, I am sad to say that this wasn't my cuppa. I felt like I was missing the point at times. The heroes, Maria and Jay, are extremely intelligent and while I expected it to have a nerdy vibe (I dig the nerdisms usually), I was utterly bored for a little over 50% of the book. Then as they figured out who the other was, it finally sparked my interest. After that it fluctuated between the good parts (when they were together) and the not so good (pretty much any time they weren't). The writing seems to prattle on about things that didn't really add value. If the story had been a little more focused on them as a unit, I would've been more engaged. I liked Maria as an individual, especially because she was unique with both brains and beauty. She was assertive and stood up for herself and others. I liked Jay AFTER he shed the @\$\$hole persona. I enjoy the author's HR titles but I would have to think a little more on whether I would continue this series or not. Safety: No others for either of them. H is bi. No rape or abuse.

ARC received in exchange for an honest review.

SmartBitches says

Full review at Smart Bitches, Trashy Books

Hold Me is both very ambitious and very uneven. We here at the Bitchery are unabashed Courtney Milan fans, to the point where I cannot possibly read a Milan book without both bias in its favor and very high expectations. As with all Milan books, I squeed repeatedly while reading, but the overall reading experience was not as enjoyable as I hoped it would be.

I love the inclusivity of the book. It incorporates characters of different ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and classes. Much of the book takes place at University of California, Berkeley, which is where I got my Masters, and I can state from experience that if the book had not included this level of inclusivity it would have been ridiculously unrealistic. Maria is Latina, Jay is Chinese and Thai, and many of the supporting characters are non-white as well. Maria is a transgender woman, and the story avoids fetishizing her or reducing her to a coming out story. She does have a coming out story and some trauma associated with this story, but her being transgender isn't the sum of her character — she's into shoes, she's into math, she's smart, she loves her brother, she likes soup, etc.

There is SO MUCH GEEKERY in this book. I love that Actual Physicist and Em flirt using math. I loved the glow in the dark shark (named 'Lisa') that Maria's ex-roommate kept in a tank in their apartment (very small shark, very big tank). I loved the reference to Douglas Adams. As an urban Californian, I also loved the reference to the fact that you can get soup here from four different ethnicities within a two-block radius.

The only part of the book that I didn't like was the actual romance, largely because Jay was so triggery for me. Actual Physicist and Em's messages back and forth often felt fake to me, like they had been practiced and rehearsed (which, to be fair, is in fact the kind of thing you can do with a written message). I felt like I was reading things that people wish they had said, not actual dialogue. When they are together in person,

they unleash their worst qualities, especially Jay.

Jay has three personalities in the book and I didn't believe in any of them. His "in person with Maria" personality is so obnoxious that I find it hard to believe that anyone associates with him. Actually, not many people do, which he thinks is because they move away or are too busy. Maybe they just hate the guy. I certainly do.

There were so many things about this book that I loved. I loved the shark and Maria's explanation for why she didn't love it all. I loved the science stuff. I loved the constant tension between people who had been raised with a lot of money and those who hadn't, and the tension between introverts and extroverts. I loved the relationship between Jay's parents and I loved how Maria's Catholic Latina grandmother breaks stereotypes about Catholic Latina grandmothers. The sex scenes are great examples of how consent, particularly explicit consent, can be incredibly erotic. Not to mention math. If they had convinced me in high school that math could be sexy maybe I would have stayed awake in class more often.

I always have to grade Courtney Milan books with a standard letter grade, and I'm giving this a B- compared to the romances I have read because the writing, the side characters, Maria, the sex, and the shark are all pretty amazing. But on our very special puppy cannon scale, which we reserve for Courtney Milan books, I'm only giving it one out of ten puppies – the puppy cannon is very demanding.

- Carrie S.

Jacob Proffitt says

I really, really want to coward out of reviewing this one like I did the first in the series. I'm a fan of Courtney Milan and like how she isn't afraid to dial things up in her stories. With this book, she not only goes contemporary, but her characters could easily be molded into progressive icons with all the diversity in play (both racial and sexual). Jay is Asian and bisexual. Maria is Hispanic and transgendered. Add some personal trauma to both (spiritual and emotional traumas) and you have what could easily have been not so much an issue book as a flat-out drama fest.

Fortunately, Milan does what she does best by making the story about characters who hold together well and represent themselves more than they do some external identity. Jay isn't Asian or bisexual so much as he is a guy trying to stay ahead of his success (convinced it can't continue), driven by a need to prove himself and suffering from an estrangement with his family he's hesitant to explore (and thus unable to resolve). Maria isn't Hispanic or transgendered so much as she is a girl trying to find people she can trust and carve out time to figure out what risks she can afford to take with her future with regards to doing what she loves vs. doing what she knows will be lucrative. I enjoyed both of them immensely and really felt for their attempts to come together and forge a relationship with trust as its foundation—something both needed desperately.

And I really like that Milan chose to forgo the easy plot devices and dodged the temptations to farce. The setup with hidden identities almost begs for relationship game-playing and I was relieved to see that subverted, here. I liked how they overcame communication and trust issues with honest effort and risking themselves emotionally to do so.

Having two characters start out so far in the emotional hole did tend to drag the story down for me, though. They both have some serious things to overcome and while I loved seeing them working it out together and

learn to understand one another, it did make for a story without many emotional high points. Yeah, they come together, but even as they do, at least one of them is looking for the other shoe to drop. That negativity made it hard for me to engage quite as deeply as I did with the first book with Blake and Tina. It was never so bad that I wanted to stop and I was engaged throughout. But I was pretty relieved when they finally figured things out and I could unclench and just be happy they'd found each other. It's still a four-star read, mind. I just could have used some lighter notes in that melody.

A note about other reviews: I admit I was surprised on seeing some of the other reviews after I'd finished the book. A lot of the "top" reviews are pretty down on the book and it looks like the common theme of those reviews is that it *isn't progressive enough*. They each have something different they wish Milan had done "better", but it sounds more than a little like personal hobby-horses to me. I find that sad because I thought Milan has done a fantastic job making a satisfying story about people who fall in love. But then, I don't have a personal hobby-horse to ride in that parade.

A note about Steamy: There are two explicit sex scenes and that puts this in the (low) middle of my steam tolerance. I admit that I wondered if being transgendered would make a difference, but it seems to have worked out about how you'd expect.

Sherwood Smith says

Here's the thing. Historical romances with 'history lite' settings and mostly-modern heroines who are there for the awesome gowns, the glittering dukes, the castles and tonnish life, are A-okay. Readers like them, I think, in the same way it's fun to cosplay historical clothes and settings without having to deal with the baggage of reality.

My problem is, I pretty much can't read these because I have been reading history for over fifty years, so the finessing of language and customs, etc, keep poking me out of the story. Also, when the narrative tone zigzags between eighteenth century and Victorian by way of modern, it can have a fuzzy effect.

That has been my experience with the two Courtney Milan historicals I tried. I loved the humor, but kept wishing that the trappings would be less out-of-focus historical and more full-on contemporary.

Well, I got what I wished for with the first of her Cyclone series, *Trade Me*, which I thought was awesome, and I liked this one just as well.

Milan tackles a whole lot of issues with this book—ethnicities, transgender, bisexuality, religions—but doesn't make it an Issue Book. These aspects are all part of the story, which is really about anger.

And not the relatively easy Romancelandia anger of being dumped by a conveniently sleazoid ex, so that H and H can get over it by finding their One True. No, this is the deep, horrific anger of grief and betrayal.

In fact, I might issue a warning here for parents who are expecting a funny, relaxing romance (view spoiler). The betrayal is not much easier to take (view spoiler).

The storyline, basically, is a twist on battle of the sexes: Jay and Maria know one another online by their usernames, and conduct a two year friendship that keeps skirting romance, except that neither is ready for romance. And when they meet in person, it's hate at first sight.

The story crackles with anger, told with wit in a vivid emotional roller coaster, and to top that, oh wow, Milan manages to make math sexy. Ditto science. You believe in these science nerds because they talk science and math at each other, and resonate on levels that only other science/math nerds pick up. That's brilliant writing.

Attraction for these two damaged people is easier to deal with than the boundaries of trust, almost impossibly thick with the scars of those terrible betrayals. The first half of the story held me breathless wondering when, and how, they were going to twig to their identities. (view spoiler) The second half held me equally riveted in learning how they would negotiate these boundaries.

There were a couple places I thought the story finessed certain aspects, contrasting with how deep it goes in other places. (view spoiler) But those were minor. Mostly I kept thinking brava, brava! I really look forward to the next in this series.

Copy provided by NetGalley

alexis says

Review Originally Posted on Lacy Literacy:

“I don’t have a good response. Not in words. Instead, I send her an emoji string: a heart, a bowl of soup, and heels.

*Sorry. I typed. **Bad at words.***

*No, she types. **I’m pretty sure that’s the emoji for “hold me.”***

I have been dying to read Hold Me since I found out about it in Fall of last year. I backtracked and read the first book in the Cyclone series, Trade Me, and fell in love with the glimpses we got of Maria, which made me that much more excited. The premise was right up my alley because it was enemies to lovers, and had the element of the main characters not knowing they were already friends online. Hold Me has a rich cast of main and side characters. Jay is Thai/Chinese and Bisexual (the word is never used, but he has dated men and women), while Maria is a Mexican Transwoman.

Jay and Maria were amazing. For me personally, they were a vast improvement as main characters compared to the previous couple, Blake and Tina, from Trade Me. Courtney Milan did an amazing job crafting them, and making their inner conflicts feel real. Seeing Jay overcome his guilt over a past experience, and Maria overcome her anxieties about loosing people was really hit home for me. Maria’s development was very special to me.

I loved Jay and Maria’s relationship. They are the quintessential enemies to lovers, but the twist of them unknowingly being friends through the internet was a great touch. The contrast between their relationship on and offline was interesting. After the inevitable reveal happened, I loved how Milan dealt with them having to reconcile their feelings and the problems their relationship had both on and offline. They are one of my favorite romance couples. Bonus points for the letter scene à la Pride and Prejudice.

Milan often has feminist ideals in her work (and even her historical romances. Just the title of The Suffragette Scandal alone should tell you that). As an Astrophysics major, addressing the sexism that runs rampant in STEM is very important to me. Jay, who is a science professor, has several interactions with Maria and one of his students in which he assumes that pretty/girly girls are vapid and don't know math/science. He is put in his place by Maria, learns from the experience, and strives to do better.

I would 100% recommend Hold Me to anyone. It is a well written, diverse romance.

◆ Read for the 2017 New Adult Reading Challenge & Bingo for the Bingo category *a diverse novel* & for the Unapologetic Romance Readers New Years 2017 Reading Challenge for *a. LGBT+ Romance*. ◆

Jade says

Reread: 2017

I still feel the same way I felt when I read it the first time! But I have been reading other people's reviews, and I've been seeing a lot of people saying that they felt like there was "too much diversity". And to that I say **fuck off**. I'm sorry we are force fed this false narrative that white, straight, and cis are the norm but that's just not true. We are a multitude of identities and I think it is amazing to see as many as we can portrayed in as many mediums as we can.

Some people said that they had a problem because an identity (whether it was race, religion, orientation, or gender) was just thrown in and not fully discussed, but do you see straight or cisgender characters having to fully explain their identities? Do you expect them to talk about their identity or for it to be announced?--How they knew they were straight and came out as straight

Unless it was stated that it was a major part of the plot, why would you expect the opposite to be true for other identities? Because they are "other" and different, so you feel the need for that to be a plot point instead of just accepting it as a part of a character/person?

Originally read:

3.5 - 4 stars

I really enjoyed this one, but wasn't a fan of the childish almost caricature portrayal of Jay and Maria's fights/arguments when they just met. But I think that the things I really liked outweighed the things that I didn't, so rounding this rating up.

I loveeed that more than half of the characters aren't white, and that they were shown as being intelligent and thriving. It's very hard as a person of color to see yourself portrayed in novels, as anything other than the sidekick friend or some lame stereotypical background character. So being able to see Maria as an incredibly smart and gorgeous Latina was awesome, especially since she was a main character! Also, a big applause for Jay not being het! I love to see authors step back from the heteronormative narrative and acknowledge that there are many of us who do not identify as straight.

I found it really rad that Maria called Jay out on his sexism, and made him reevaluate his prejudices against women who did not fit his schema of what a "female scientist" should look like. Not only do I appreciate that this was brought up, but I loved that he had to work through his flawed system and thoughts. It wasn't just brushed off that he made a mistake and would do better next time, he actually sat with it for a multiple days

and realized that it was a huge issue he needed to change.

" "I don't think women are stupid per se; I reserve that judgment only for the women that engage in overt displays of socially constructed femininity" is an inherently wrong belief. It wasn't a one-time mistake or an accident that I applied it to her.

It was a fundamental flaw.

...

This realization takes a few days to sink in, for me to really understand it. I wasn't just wrong or mistaken. I apparently have the notion, rooted deep in my subconscious, that women who look nice aren't real."

...

We could have been friends and instead, I hurt her. I have an image of the person I want to be, and this is not him.

To me the best apology is acceptance that you fucked up and changed behavior, and that is why I don't hate Jay. Because Jay was shown that his ideas were hurtful and a major problem, he realized that his beliefs/ideology needed to change. That's what I want in a character, one who takes accountability for their actions and actively tries to change.

I absolutely loved that things such as mansplaining, issues for women in STEM, and the act of men relying on female labor to absolve them of their sexist mistakes were brought up. These are issues that I talk about with my friends, that are experienced in real life, but are usually never really brought up in books. It was good to see these topics being tackled in such a smart way.

Overall I really adored this book. I loved seeing/reading about real people. Also, all of the representation in this book was pretty epic--gender, race, sexuality. Especially since a lot of the representation was based on the main characters, Maria being Latina and trans and Jay being Thai/Chinese and not straight (And can I say that I am in love with how his sexuality is identified: *"My sexuality has always been people who aren't afraid of differential equations."*)

Wendy'sThoughts says

Leave it to Courtney Milan to write a romance of this complexity...

She has the insight and ability; she has a cover which makes you wonder about him...and now here is more.....

Eighteen months ago, Maria Lopez felt an unexpected spark with Jay, a hot, tattooed, motorcycle-riding bad boy who checked off every item on her fantasy list. But "too good to be true" never ends well. So when he asked for her number, she walked away.

When she runs into him again, she discovers that Jay is a different kind of trouble than she's imagined. He's a demanding, driven genius, and once he's set his sights on something, he does not give up. Now that their paths have crossed once more, he's not going to let her get away until he knows exactly what's on her fantasy list...and he figures out how to make her embrace it.

Hold Me is about Maria Lopez (Tina's best friend from Trade Me) and Jay Thalang (not appearing anywhere yet but here are three things about him that you might want to know: 1. He has tattoos. 2. He plays with lasers for a living. And 3. He has a pinterest page where he pins pictures of people gratuitously eating sandwiches in public.)

Eventually this book will have a cover. But first, I have to have a cover shoot, because there are no stock photos available that depict a tattooed man who could pass as Jay Thalang, who pins pictures of people gratuitously eating sandwiches in public.

Giedre says

3.5/5

I appreciate what Milan is doing with her contemporary titles, but I also feel like I'm missing part of Maria and Jay's story. This would have worked much better if we got to see the beginning of their online friendship. Jay's real life assholery would've still been abominable, but Maria's decision to give him a chance in real life would've felt less forced because it's all based on their online interactions as Em and Actual Physicist. Pretty good, definitely interesting, but not great.

The joy and the agony of being a perfectionist in a changing world is that you will never succeed in being without fault, but you also never run out of chances.

Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says

I want to preface this review with this : **marginalized readers, you are enough.** Your **existence** is enough of a reason for you to be portrayed in any work of fiction. You are enough, damn it. I'm starting with this because I've made the mistake of reading reviews and I'm appalled that "*Courtney Milan checks too many diversity boxes*" (whatever that means) would be the extent of many people's first reaction to the wonderful diverse cast she offers us in Hold Me. I'm just... shaking my head, frowning, when I see that people don't realize that they're actively telling marginalized readers that stories representing them must have some kind of educational purpose to mean something. And that is fucked-up in so many ways, I can't even begin to express them.

Now for the book : **Hold Me is a brilliant example of what I wish I'd find more often in romance novels**, and takes the enemy-to-lovers trope to a whole new level, without it never being unbelievable but rather, gradual and splendidly executed.

? First of all, *opens mic* **MARIA LOPEZ IS THE BEST AND THAT IS ALL**. She's so fierce and complex, and **I am in awe of her**. I guess I just really really admire her. I want to be like her when I'm a grown up, actually, and who cares if she's younger than I am, right? *Technicalities, etc.* She's so courageous and brave, gorgeous and smart, and every time I picture her in my head she's standing on a table, the whole 6'2 of her shining, telling calmly but firmly the hypnotized assistance to fuck off because *she is enough*. Oh

god I'm crying again. What is *it* with me. The fact is, Maria doesn't apologize for who she is, but that does not mean she never doubts or doesn't feel the weight of her insecurities. She does, and that's what makes her so real and makes me want to hold her. I've seen readers being confused by the differences between her persona on the internet - Em, the apocalyptic scientist, and Actual Physicist's confident - and what she shows the world but... *Excuse me?* I mean I've talked about personal things in my reviews that even my family doesn't know about, so... of course I get it. I *more than* get it, actually : I love it. **I adored the added complexity it created, for both main characters.** I also strongly disagree with people who complain that her being a trans woman wasn't "enough of an issue" : why the fuck should it be? Maria Lopez is a Latinx trans woman, a badass and a fantastic character, and that's all you need to know. She's *enough*. The End.

? Hmm, so I adored Actual Physicist, but I'm not gonna lie, **it took me a very very veryyyyy long time to warm up to Jay.** I mean, the guy has so much misogyny to unpack and he's so... *unaware* of this fact, it pushed my buttons (and not the good ones). The way he thought that he was one of the good guys (because having women friends makes a feminist out of you, have you heard? *Not*) made him so predictable. At first. However, I loved how Maria called him on his shit and how he actually, you know, *listened*. Even if he took his sweet time, he evolved and became such a caring and adorable love interest, how could I hold a grudge? Moreover. Ugh. I am gonna make this review personal am I not. Look, I was a straight As student. Until I wasn't. Until I started skipping classes. Until I dropped college altogether. And the fact is, no matter the fact that I came back and graduated and fought to win a job I love, there's a part of me who will always stay stuck on the utter disappointment I was for my parents at the time. That shit doesn't go away. Plus I am a workaholic and I thank books every day because if I didn't have this passion? Dude. I'd be stuck on Pinterest looking at teaching stuff all day. So I guess **I... related to Jay?** In that sense? I know how hard it can be to *let it go*, and despite my initial doubts, I felt for him.

? Hold Me being a romance novel, I guess you expect me to ramble about Maria and Jay's chemistry and so on... But I will not, because strangely I don't think its most important strength lies here (even if yes, I did like them together a lot). On the contrary, what made me love this book has more to do with **the way it tackles the issues of classism, of judging upon appearances, of prejudices, of complicated family relationships...** So. Much. Win. Not to mention a very needed look at what it means for women to work in STEM in our sexist world that attributes a value on women depending on how they dress.

Courtney Milan deals with these issues **in such a thoughtful and satisfying** way, without never resorting to cheap cop-outs, and I love her for that.

That's why even though the romance itself was more a 4 stars for me (for personal reasons we can never really explain : we feel it, you know? Mostly I discovered that flirting with Math was not really my thing), **Hold Me as a whole more than deserves a 5 stars rating.**

Rep : Latinx trans woman MC, Chinese/Thai American bisexual MC (whose mother is Muslim and father is Buddhist)

TW : anxiety, panic attacks, death of a sibling, suicide

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Bibi says

Spoiler Alert

My love for Courtney Milan is irrevocable. Her ability to incorporate math and science into the romance genre is simply genius.

I have read The Duchess War, The Heiress Effect, and The Countess Conspiracy and her characters, particularly the heroines, are never portrayed as anything but smart and I would be shocked to the point of clutching pearls if she ever wrote an insipid female character.

Hold Me was unlike any romance book I've read, with its underlying themes of racial diversity and inclusiveness. It really was a smorgasbord of race, religion, and gender issues. Jay, the male MC is Filipino, of Buddist and Muslim descent. Maria aka MCL, our female MC, is Latino from Catholic stock. So far so good.

The premise is not entirely groundbreaking, an online connection that translates to real life, regardless, I happily dove in. And for the first half of Hold Me, I was completely transfixed. The banter between our MCs was refreshing and cute and I cheered on as they went from online to real life friends.

Midway through the story we learn that **Maria is Transgender**. As I said, Hold Me is a bold gesture from CM which must be commended, and if I wanted to be politically correct, I'd refrain from nitpicking.

But nitpick, I must.

My first angst is: "Why was Maria not Caucasian?" The way I see it, it seems rather convenient to cast Jay and Maria as ethnic minorities. I'm not saying it's bad, just convenient.

Additionally, I was puzzled by Jay's reaction once he realized Maria was transgender. I imagined a scenario with him bursting with curiosity. Had it been me, I would want to know **EVERYTHING**. The whole enchilada.

How long it took to complete the transformation particularly the sex reassignment surgery? When did Maria know she was a female trapped in a male body? You know, questions any one of us would ask. But to completely avoid mentioning it even in the vaguest manner, made the rest of their story seem unbelievably superficial.

Very quickly I lost interest, and while Ms. Milan attempted to reel me back, I'd shut down mentally and finished reading purely because I'd invested so many hours.

Whitney Atkinson says

Seeing Courtney Milan's list of books in the back of this one was the only buoy I had against the sadness of finishing this. I LOVE the messages in Courtney Milan books, and this was no exception.

Before I sing its praises, I want to note a few things that aren't my favorite:

1. The character dialogue often was unrealistic and cheesy. It ranged from small things like the main character calling her brother "little brother" through text messages (??? which i hate. i don't text my older sister like "hi older sister" lol), to larger things like the main character's parents making jokes and speaking and sticking their tongues out like they're 12. A lot of this dialogue was great, but there were moments like the aforementioned that made me cringe.
2. Some scenes dragged on and on and didn't add new information to the book. Mainly, I didn't care about the side characters, so when Maria interacted with them, I was less interested.

But the things I loved:

1. This is an enemies to lovers book unlike any I've read before. The guy starts out genuinely horrible. I remember considering DNFing this book because the guy's attitude toward women was so gross, but I'm glad I stuck through it. The main character calls him out on his bullshit and he goes through an entire journey of apologizing and being a better person, which rocked. Usually, male love interests are misogynists and don't change throughout the book, or else they're born perfect feminists and the entire book highlights that. I appreciate how this book shows you have to learn from your mistakes and it's possible to check your ego and do so.
2. Maria is a fabulous, strong main character. Her assurance in herself and the outward facade of confidence was so relatable, and I loved how her inner journey focused on fostering an inner confidence to match. It was so realistic for me and I admire how her strength also made the characters' interactions super mature.
3. The writing of this is gorgeous in places. The idea that these two people are more comfortable knowing each other online rather than in real life was SOOOOO relatable so I loved that part. The writing of that conflict was spot-on and this book had so many beautiful moments of inner reflection for both characters.
4. Most obviously, the inclusivity of this story is massive. Trans mexican main character, Thai/Chinese bisexual love interest, Chinese side characters, gender non-conforming side character. It was awesome.

Highly recommend this and other books from Courtney Milan. I'm stoked to keep reading this series and see what else is in store.

Erika says

So I've been in a book slump for about a year and Courtney Milan's Hold Me has managed to finally get me out of it. I'm over here grinning like a loon because this book has made me super happy.

There was nerdery galore, unstereotypical POCs, sarcasm and snark... just all kinds of the things that made this book a delight to read.

I'll be back soon with a better review.
