



## The Heart of Christmas

*Brenda Novak*

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# **The Heart of Christmas**

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**The Heart of Christmas Brenda Novak**

**Just call her Christmas Eve...**

Eve Harmon has always enjoyed Christmas, but this year it reminds her of everything she doesn't have. Almost all her friends are married now, and that's what Eve wants, too. Love. A husband and kids of her own. But the B and B she manages, and even Whiskey Creek, the small Gold Country town where she was born and raised, suddenly seem...confining.

Eve's worried that her future will simply be a reflection of her past. There's no one in the area she could even imagine as a husband—until a handsome stranger comes to town. Eve's definitely attracted to him, and he seems to have the same reaction to her. But his darkly mysterious past could ruin Eve's happily ever after—just when it finally seems within reach. And just when she's counting on the best Christmas of her life!

## **The Heart of Christmas Details**

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## From Reader Review The Heart of Christmas for online ebook

### **katwiththehat says**

This was a cute read about Eve, a bed and breakfast owner who's been down on her luck in love, and Rex, an ex-con and ex-gang member who is on the run from his old life and just needs a second chance. There were lots of things to like about this book. Eve and Rex are characters you want to cheer for, that you want that happily ever after to come around to. You can't help but feel sorry for their lives so far and want to see them succeed this time. I also liked the way the author built up the town and personalities of all the side characters. It was a richly developed world, particularly with the side stories about (view spoiler).

PLlease excuse typos/name misspellings. Entered on screen reader.

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### **Madison Warner Fairbanks says**

Heart of Christmas by Brenda Novak

"She'd already made up her mind to surf the wave she was riding all the way into shore--shore being the moment Brent left Whiskey Creek for good. Yes, she'd crash in the foamy surf. But he wouldn't be around to see it, and it wasn't the crash that mattered. It was having the guts to stay on the board."

Exuberance? Confidence? Or falling in love?

Eve Harmon is a strong, independent woman who decides to celebrate her birthday and is confident and bold enough to go out by herself. Awesome.

Okay maybe not the best choice at the end of the night but I'm sure I'm not the only who has been there and done that! Fortunately Eve's experience is way more sexy and satisfying. And the best part - a great guy and No Regrets for Eve. Way to go!

This is the sixth book in the Whiskey Creek series by Brenda Novak. There are several references to prior stories and relationships in this book but I think it includes enough explanation and background information for a new reader not to get lost and a series reader not to be bored with long background detail that's already known.

Minor spoilers follow\*\*\*\*\*. I'm still concerned about the Cheyene deception from the prior book and there is continuing storyline here with the birth of her baby.

I received a copy of this book from the author.

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### **Jae says**

DNF @72%

I stopped and decided to take a breather a month ago when the story got too depressing and I hated both H/h. Then I started again today but just couldn't get into it still. Why force myself and waste my time.

So, an unpleasant **1 STAR**. A pity, because I loved Rex when he first appeared in BN's Bulletproof series.

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### **Jacqueline says**

I really enjoyed this addition to the Whiskey Creek series. Except for that weird editing blip that I mentioned in the comments. I think the brothers ages were meant to be 40 and 42.

So it was fast paced and pretty well plotted. I really enjoyed the hero. It hardly ever happens that a hero is an ex con where he actually did the crime he was sent up for. And it wasn't even to kill his father to save his abused sister as it normally is. No this guy was caught selling drugs. Not a spoiler because you know this from the very first. So the author does a very good job of explaining the circumstances and redeeming her hero.

Characterization of Eve who we've seen throughout the series as a secondary character is also well done. Here is a woman who has tried and tried to find love and sees all her friends fall in love and get married. She's jealous and sad and sorry for herself. She tries not to be but she is wondering what she can do to help herself and change her situation. And she has a legitimate concern, she is 35 and unmarried. That is a natural situation where you start to wonder if it will ever happen for you and your biological clock starts ticking pretty hard. (I married when I was 37 so I know whereof I speak.) So when she meets the hero, she has a drunken one night stand.

Since the hero is still running from some bad guys he met in prison, highjinks ensue.

Really enjoyed it and can't wait for Riley and Pheonix's story. I always suspected those two were going to end up together. This Heart of Mine

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### **L.A. Miller says**

I was given an ARC of this book from Netgalley and I am writing this review with mixed emotions. From the beginning I was drawn into the story. Eve Harmon is one of the last among her friends to be single. As Christmas approaches she is reminded of the dream she does not have. A husband and the children she thought she would have by now. When she awakens to find a complete stranger in her bed her world begins to unravel and she begins to question everything she once held as valuable. A great job at her parent's Bed and Breakfast, a close group of friends who will always have her back and the small town she loves. Eve is not the type to just sleep with any man. As she approaches her 35th birthday, she can count her lovers on one hand with fingers to spare. So why would she take a total stranger to her bed? What's worse, is the memory she has tells her it was one of the most amazing nights of her life.

Rex McCready has no time in his life for a relationship, not when he has gone into hiding to protect his life. With his past and the secrets he carries, he cannot risk falling for this beauty that has beguiled him. Yet he cannot stay away either.

I enjoyed the chemistry between the two characters and the fact that both try to deny what is really going on between them. I also enjoyed the cast of characters that played dominate roles in previous books. You do not have to read the earlier books to enjoy this, but based on Ms. Novak's writing skills you might consider adding them to your library. So the real question is, why such a low rating for this book? The ending left you hanging, as if part of the chapter was missing and you are left unsatisfied. Picture yourself enjoying a five

star meal, anticipating the climax of dessert and coffee only to be left with a check. Better yet, your date is that hot guy down the hall, the one you have been fantasizing about for months and after he drops you off at your door, you are not only hoping for that much anticipated kiss but maybe some sizzling action between the sheets. Instead he turns without a word and heads for his apartment, leaving you standing there, wondering what just happened. This is the feeling you get at the end and for that reason alone I only gave this book two instead of the four or five stars it might have rated, which is sad because up till then I really enjoyed the book.

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### **Océano de libros says**

A Eve Harmon le encanta la Navidad pero este año no tanto, a sus treinta y cinco años aún sigue soltera y con un futuro incierto, tampoco ayuda lo que le rodea: sus amigos y sus vidas de casados le recuerdan lo que no tiene. Su vida monótona da un cambio cuando conoce a un misterioso hombre.

Rex McCready es toda una incógnita, su vida gira en torno a las mentiras y a la realidad de no poder vivir una vida normal debido a su oscuro pasado y todo peligra cuando conoce a Eve.

El séptimo libro de la serie “Whiskey Creek” nos trae una historia de amor pero con mucha intriga y secretos por desvelar; en ese aspecto no nos defrauda. Su autora tiene una capacidad para narrar las historias que quieras o no te atrapa. En este caso concreto con su misterioso protagonista con el que hasta nos haremos un lío con sus múltiples identidades, jeje.

La novela me ha gustado porque tiene ese punto de intriga, Rex como personaje me pareció bastante completo e interesante. Eve por otro lado es la cara amable y también tiene una pizca de triste por su situación, ¡como si se le acabara el mundo! en fin...la historia cumple su función que es mantenernos entretenidos un buen rato.

Lo peor si es que puede tenerlo es como ya me pasó con otra de estas novelas es que es demasiado larga en partes que creo que no lo necesitan y luego tiene un desenlace que es un suspiro, que todo se resuelva tan fácilmente y no avance un poco más en el tiempo es un fastidio.

También otra cosa que me pareció de ciencia ficción es ese grupo de amigos que están para todo, ¿de verdad hay gente que lleva la amistad tan a fondo? Buenos amigos como estos no he visto por ahí, o no en tal cantidad, pero bueno esto no es la vida real es una historia jajaja.

Por último, me queda tirarme de los pelos con el personaje de Cheyenne y lo que hizo, de verdad me pude, y ahí sigue el misterio sin desvelar.

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### **Christi Snow says**

#### **My Review:**

Everything about the romance story in this book worked for me. I like that both Eve and Rex were really too drunk to remember what happened when they hooked up. As the story evolves, we find out just how out of character that was for BOTH of them, which made it feel even more like fate.

Rex is everything that Whiskey Creek is not. He's an ex-con, ex-gang member, used to using violence if the situation warrants, and on the run for his life. Eve is a 35 yo with the life of a grandmother...she runs the local B&B and is everyone's friend. But because she's so incredibly sweet and everyone's friend, they all feel very protective of her especially with things with her new guy just don't add up. Something isn't right with

him. It served for a great dichotomy in their relationship which I just loved. I also really loved that I could NOT figure out how Brenda Novak was going to write herself out of this conflict. With only 10% left in the book, I just couldn't see how it could possibly end up happy for everyone. But she did it and she did it beautifully with everything that Whiskey Creek and this group of friends symbolize. I loved that it kept me guessing, but ended exactly in the best way for this couple with the help of Eve's friends

What didn't work for me in this book were a couple of the side stories. Teddy's attitude toward Eve's new romance felt over the top. If I was the love of his life, Sophia (who he threw Eve over for), I would have been calling him on it big-time. His reactions felt more like the reactions from a jealous lover, not a friend. I hate the whole baby story line with the two brothers. It feels so soap-opera-ish, it almost makes me want to stop reading the books because I know that's going to blow up soon.

There aren't very many friends left unattached, but I want to beg for Bax to get his own story. I love him and really, really want him to find his HEA. Come on Harlequin...you can do this, right? I want to see Bax happy. I know that Harlequin doesn't normally do GLBT romance, but with Brenda Novak at the helm, you can't go wrong on this one.

I received a complimentary copy of this book in return for an honest review.

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### **Gail says**

Wow! What an amazing book! I think this is my new favorite in the Whiskey Creek series. I had a hard time putting it down because I had to see how it would all end. It kept me guessing until the end of the book. I just loved the ending! This is Eve Harmon's story. She runs Little Mary's B&B owned by her retired parents. She is turning 35 and feels like she is a loser. All of her friends are getting married and having babies. She goes to Sadies (hope I got that name right) by herself to celebrate her birthday. She ends up getting drunk and comes home with a guy she isn't sure who he is. He keeps giving fake names. His real name is Rex McCready and he has a long past of terrible things that have happened to him. Can he get over the past and can Eve help him do it? Read the story today and you will not be sorry. I just love the Whiskey Creek series!

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### **Brandee (un)Conventional Bookworms says**

It's always such a pleasure to return to Whiskey Creek. I've become so fond of all the characters, they're like friends. I was happy that Eve got her story and curious to see how it would turn out.

Eve Harmon is just a lovely young woman. She's one of those women you know you'd shy away from because of her looks but would be drawn to nonetheless because of her genuine affability. She's sweet, loyal, and would do anything to help someone in need. She just happens to be turning 35 and, not being married yet despite most of her friends being so, is making her take stock of her life.

Brent Taylor/Rex, happens upon Eve on her birthday, when she's feeling a bit sorry for herself. They spend the night together, which is all Brent could promise. But he's finding it hard to leave Eve, even though it's really in her best interest that he do exactly that. Brent isn't what he seems and his past puts Eve, and everyone in Whiskey Creek, in possible danger.

Although this story primarily revolved around Eve and Brent, I like how Novak always incorporates the entire cast, so I catch up with them all. I really liked the element of suspense that Brent/Rex brought to the story. I liked watching as Eve helped him heal from his past. I also enjoyed the mystery of "Little Mary" - the story Ted decided to work on, with Eve's help. I hope that element continues. Although I'm still a little unhappy with Cheyenne about certain decisions she made, it was nice to see her and Dylan so happy. Despite a certain thing that happened between Eve and Brent, which I thought was a bit trite, I enjoyed how their story evolved and where it ended up. And of course, I adored seeing the group rally around Eve when she needed them most.

The Heart of Christmas was a satisfying return to Whiskey Creek...kind of like cuddling up under a favorite blanket. It's warm, comfortable, familiar, and makes you feel good. This group of friends continue to endear themselves and I'll be eager to return again.

\*\*I received a complimentary copy from the author in exchange for an honest review.\*\*

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### **Dianne says**

What could be better than a Holiday romance in a cozy little town where everyone knows and cares about everyone else and that holiday feeling lasts throughout the year? Welcome to Whiskey Creek, welcome to the warm romantic world of Brenda Novak that carries the edge of mystery and spirits from the past???

Eve is one of Whiskey Creek's own, running a B&B, single, no prospects and her clock is ticking as her birthday rolls around. Why not do something out of character, something no one would believe? All of her friends are either married or have a significant other, but a few too many drinks and waking up next to a gorgeous stranger was a little more than she had planned as a celebration. Nor did she plan on discovering he is staying at her B&B. Can you say "awkward?"

Besides being handsome, charming and feeling as awkward as she does, Rex has a dark past he is trying to outrun. Has he brought danger to Whiskey Creek? Who is this amazing man who has become a part of Whiskey Creek? With the help of her friends, Eve is determined to get to the bottom of what is haunting this man with many aliases. After a bleak romantic past, is it possible that the one man Eve wants to share her life and her Christmases with could be too hot to handle?

**The Heart of Whiskey Creek** by Brenda Novak blends the joy of the holiday season with the joy of finally finding a chance at love for two lonely souls who expected to be alone forever. There is no sizzling romance or eyeball melting sensual scenes, but there is a quiet, mature feel that comes across as real, warm and easy to believe, as if it could happen for anyone. In the spirit of the holidays, Ms. Novak has presented readers with a delightful read that will help usher in the magic of the season and the beauty of love, while imparting just enough mystery to make this a unique read one can still sigh over!

I received an ARC edition from Harlequin in exchange for my honest review.

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## **Ferne says**

It's the morning after Eve Harmon's birthday and she wakes up to find a strange man in her bed and so the story begins. WoW! What an opening!! Oh and by the way, skipping ahead for a minute, the reader will also learn that this strange man in Eve's bed is what some of us imagine as drop-dead handsome! One of the best parts is that Eve wakes up first "the morning after" and Eve will take her leisurely, sweet time to describe this man explicitly to enable each reader to engage all senses in a leisurely, sweet time of imagining the stranger next to Eve. You'll never put the book down now!

Eve Harmon runs Little Mary's, a bed-and-breakfast in a converted Victorian home, owned by her retired parents. Thankfully, since their retirement they travel in a RV and aren't at home on the morning in question since their house is a mere hundred yards in front of Eve's small bungalow. Also thankfully, the strange man doesn't even have to be asked to leave so she can get to work. So although she's still thinking about last night, she tries her very best to put her focus back "on the job" and deliver the breakfast trays to the guests that had previously requested breakfast in their rooms. Imagine Eve's surprise when she's ready to make the usual polite greeting of "Good Morning. I hope you enjoy your breakfast." and is rendered speechless as the man that woke up in her bed this morning is now in one of her guest rooms and demanding to know "How'd you find me?"

If you remember anything about Whiskey Creek from reading other titles in the series, you'll know that there will be many friends alert to Eve's birthday, Eve's usual habits, and Eve's distraction from her usual focus on all things Christmas not only for celebration at the B&B but on behalf of all the town. If this is your first introduction to Whiskey Creek, you'll begin to meet many of the families and neighbors that live in the small town and be captivated with how they love and care for one another.

I mentioned this comment in an earlier Brenda Novak book review but it definitely deserves mention again. One of the special delights of the Whiskey Creek Series is that each novel can be enjoyed as a stand-alone title. There are some novels that are tiring to read as in order to move the current story forward, the author seems to provide a comprehensive review of the attributes and histories of all characters to date which interrupts the flow of the current novel and is more of a frustrating and distracting interruption to the reader – regardless if an independent title reader or series reader. I appreciate being able to remember the characters and their storylines independently and to totally engross myself in each novel without distraction.

Whiskey Creek is a small town so I know this series will eventually come to an end but until that time, I will continue to look forward to read each new adventure and excuse to visit with the Whiskey Creek characters. Without a doubt, the families, neighbors and friends of Whiskey Creek are genuine, loving, caring individuals and carry "The Heart of Christmas" in their hearts each day of the year. Reading Eve's story as with each book in the series reminds me of the song, "If Every Day Was Like Christmas Time" as performed by Elvis Presley and especially the stanza of:

"Oh why can't every day be like Christmas?  
Why can't that feeling go on endlessly,

For if every day could be just like Christmas,  
What a wonderful world this would be."

I hope you'll visit with Eve, her friends, and all of the wonderful townspeople in Whiskey Creek. Open the pages of "The Heart of Christmas" and your visit begins. You'll be ready to celebrate Christmas with joy, laughter, and love and to keep those feelings endlessly.

I was lucky enough to receive a pre-publication copy of this title from the author to read and review.

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### **Jonetta says**

I've not been a fan of Eve Harmon so it was with a fair amount of reluctance I started this story. Those familiar with the series may remember her many missteps in trying to get and keep a man.

#### **Quick summary**

It begins with Eve waking up after a night of excessive birthday celebrating to find a stranger (handsome, though) in her bed. She's upset that she can't seem to find a committed relationship after being dumped several times. All of her friends are happily connected and Eve isn't looking forward to a lonely Christmas. Rex (the stranger) might be a possibility but he doesn't seem interested...initially. Things get complicated, though, when the whole town finds out about her "overnight guest."

#### **The heart of the story**

I loved how the story included a crossover character, Rex McCready, from the romantic suspense series, Bulletproof. I read Inside earlier this year and am glad I did as I had a better understanding of Rex's journey prior to ending up in Whiskey Creek. He's got a secret and dangerous past that is always in the background. It adds a suspense element that works.

It was great to see Eve grow through this relationship, focusing on what's really important as she tries to trust Rex in the midst of information that tells her to do otherwise. She stood by him, trusting her instincts for a change when it was hard to do so.

#### **The bottom line**

This is a wonderful story though not your traditional Christmas fare. The issues are tough, even life threatening at times. I'm just glad that Eve has finally discovered her true heart and found a reason to put someone else's well being ahead of her own. Well done. 4.5 stars

(I received an ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review)

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### **Kathryn says**

ARC Received from NetGalley.

For the most part, I have enjoyed the Whiskey Creek series. I like small town contemporaries, and HQN is typically my go-to pub for this genre. The first five books flowed well and featured likable couples and

subplots that worked within the community. I mentioned here that Book 6, Come Home to Me, disappointed me mainly because of the Chey/Dylan subplot and the lack of chemistry between the main characters. I usually give a series a second strike before I decide to end, and I'm sorry to say The Heart of Christmas didn't quite do it for me.

I have liked reading about Eve in the previous books. When you get to know her, you figure eventually she'll get a story of her own. This particular one, however, struck me almost as a copy of the Callie/Levi story in Book 3. Eve yearns for true love, and a stranger with a mysterious past drifts into town. It read too similar to Callie's story (only there's no life threatening illness involved), and I felt as Eve might have been cheated with a "retread".

As for the Chey/Dylan subplot, it continues to play out, but as you read you have a feeling it's going to blow up in a future book. In all honesty I don't want to be around for that. I think the only thing that could entice me to read more Whiskey Creek is if the lone gay character, Baxter, gets a full book. Not scenes as a secondary character, but A. Full. Book. Seeing as this is Harlequin, though, my hopes are not high.

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### **Keri says**

3.5 Stars. Glad Eve finally found her love interest. Still ticked over how Cheyenne handled the baby issue and the lying only continues in this book. Poor Dylan when he finds out the truth and he will because you can't hide that kind of lie forever.

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### **Arlene says**

The **Heart of Christmas** by Brenda Novak is yet another new-to-me author and new-to-me series that I picked up during my holiday reading frenzy. After diving into this enticing holiday read, I definitely want to continue with the Whiskey Creek series.

In **The Heart of Christmas**, we meet Eve Harmon during the winter season as she prepares her B&B for another Christmas. At thirty-five, it's the holiday season that accentuates what Eve is missing in her life. After several failed relationships, she wants nothing more than to fall in love, as she sees all of her friends getting married and having children. So, when she indulges in a one-night stand before her birthday, the mysterious man she brings home also comes with tons of secrets and a shady past that has her family and friends leery about this stranger.

Rex McCready has been on the run for many years. At eighteen he was imprisoned for some mistakes that seem to follow him no matter how much time passes, and now the Crew he joined in prison, which he's been trying to escape, is after him once again. When he lands in Whiskey Creek, he indulges in what he hopes is a quick reprieve, but Eve eventually becomes a safe haven for him at a time when his life seems so out of control. As they begin to fall in love, he knows the best thing he can do for Eve is to leave Whiskey Creek rather than bring the dangers of his past to this small town and her community.

Eve and Rex were a great couple to come to know. I have no experience with Eve's past, so I didn't have any preconceptions about her friends and their decisions that seemed to affect her life. These two characters definitely had a ton of chemistry to melt plenty of snow! I enjoyed journeying with Rex and Eve as they fell

in love, faced some difficulties, and came together to find a way to make things work.

The secondary characters in the novel also grabbed my attention enough to want to pick up the series, so I'm eager to get to know more about Eve's friends.

Lastly, the whole mystery around Little Mary's death and her ghost added a touch of intrigue to the novel, which was a perfect blend to the Christmas romance, drama and adventure in Whiskey Creek!

Overall, I enjoyed this Christmas story that takes place amongst a tight group of friends, a small town and a quaint B&B. I'll be sure to dive further into the Whiskey Creek series to learn more about the rest of the cast.

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