



# True Story

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Olivia Monday, an impoverished widow, has taken a position as "secretary" to an eccentric, scandalous rake - a divorced man with a brood of eight children and at least two gun-shot wounds. For one year, against the advice of her remaining family members, she agrees to live in his remote Cornish castle and put pen to paper on his behalf.

Despite everything she's heard about him, she's unafraid. Olivia welcomes the distraction this unusual post will provide— as well as the large fee— because the alternative of relying on relatives to put a roof over her head is intolerable.

True Deverell has decided it's time to set the record straight. He means to dictate his memoirs to this little widow who, according to the instructions he sent to his solicitor, should merely be plain and have a neat hand. Those are his only requirements. He doesn't want any distractions, has endured his fill of scandal and intends now to leave the "True Story" on paper so that perhaps, one day, people will forgive his mistakes. But when Mrs. Olivia Monday arrives on his doorstep in her leaky boots and crumpled bonnet, True realizes that perhaps his story isn't over yet.

## **True Story Details**

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## From Reader Review True Story for online ebook

### OLT says

It's not often that I develop feelings for a fictional male in a romance novel, but hero True Deverell has truly made an impression on me. He's arrogant, impulsive, exuberant, autocratic, forthright, rude, impatient, thoughtful, rather sweet(don't tell him that), romantic (again, keep it to yourself), kind and caring (shh!), larger than life and really rather adorable in a puppy-dog sort of way.

Starting life as an almost feral foundling, he is truly a self-made, self-educated man. Now the rich owner of a gambling club, he and his rather scandalous life have been the fodder for gossip for years. It doesn't help that he has seven children by 3 different women, most illegitimate offspring except for those with his ex-wife (Divorce! Even more scandal!)

Then we have heroine Olivia. She started out life rather exuberant and free-spirited but along the way life has been trying to suppress her a bit, and, superficially, it seems to be succeeding. Three times a widow at 28 years of age, with the 3 deaths suspicious enough to come to the attention of Bow Street, almost penniless and not wishing to be dependent on her stepbrother, she accepts the job of secretary to True, to help him write down his memoirs.

There's a richness and depth to this story that you don't often find in an HR. This hasn't been written in the usual formulaic manner of "boy meets girl, sparks fly, they have lots of sex". There are complex characters and complex relationships here, not only the H/h relationship but also True and his numerous offspring. The writing is exquisite, humorous at times, somewhat serious at others, but never angst-ridden in that annoying manner of some HRs with tortured heroes. Perhaps True has more reason to be tortured than many a hero I've come across in a romance, but he doesn't let life get him down or feel sorry for himself. Nor does our admirable heroine.

Fresina's characters are a breath of fresh air and her writing is superior to that of most authors of the genre. I truly loved this book and can't wait for the next in the series.

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### Carolyn says

I really liked this book, and would highly recommend it! The two Main Characters are a delightful surprise! True starts out as a Rake of sorts. He doesn't care what anyone has to say about him. Working with Olivia, He helps her to come out of her shell. They are very funny and I am glad they found each other. This is the first book of Jayne Fresina that I have read and will be looking forward to reading more of her books!

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### Sarah Webber says

Jayne Fresina doesn't write the same books as everyone else. Which is why you should read them. Unfortunately, this is just the first of a possible 8 book series which will probably be published at a rate of only one per year. I hate waiting. I really should discover excellent writers only after they have completed their life's work. More fool me.

Usually, I do not purchase the books I read. We have a good library and I visit often. Foolishly, our library only has 2 of Fresina's works. Just enough to whet my appetite. This book, I own.

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### **Katie Kofemug says**

To start with, I loved Olivia, her character, growth, and sense of self was an ongoing exploration I could feel, not just read. Her actions and reactions made sense to me. She tested boundaries in context of the times, got burned, and sought a way to carry on that was, imho, very accurately portrayed. She latched on to her late husband's encouragement to find a purpose, to be useful, and made it her own. That she never doubted her innocence or suspected anyone else of guilt was Olivia. I think some folks will not like her characterization. If you want your values in costume this isn't the book for you.

I enjoyed True, even when too many clues shouted Crockford at me and a couple backstory bits were identical enough to convince me. If you're unfamiliar with the history of Crockford's Gaming Club it probably won't occur to you True is loosely based on a historical figure. In reality, Crockford wasn't raised by wolves, he knew his parents. Crockford didn't have an American widow to refine his rough edges or speech, but he was married twice with 14 children.

True's differences were almost enough to explain the man he was but, for me, the way he spoke and thought often did not mesh with the man he was \*supposed\* to be - even at 40. A rough edged proprietor of a Grand Gaming Club would have done just as well in this story [imho] but as the story went on, he revealed he was not truly the man he was recording for his children in his memoirs, or as feral as he liked to believe. He was delighted to shock but his bottom line was as basic as Olivia's. Home, family and purpose. She seasoned her version with love, he preferred the spice of pleasure. He held those values before Olivia arrived and she had to sift through a great deal of rhetoric to get to that truth.

My quibble and what kept this from being an 5 star book for me, was the whole divorce thing. Well, the marriage and divorce thing I guess. Still ::hand wave:: works if you want your rogue/ rake to be misunderstood. I've read stories where divorce worked as part of characterization but in this one, it felt too much like a plot device.

When I suspended my historical trivia and ::waved:: the incongruities, I enjoyed True as presented. Not only was he exceedingly amusing, he could be very charming in a awakening sort of way. He was doing the best he could with what he had to do with at the time. He was definitely an evolving character and they make the best heroes, imho. I could see Olivia and True developing friendship, fascination with each other as they surprised themselves by connecting on levels beyond the physical and THAT for me is vital in a romance novel. If all they have is physical chemistry and the unwillingness to control their impulses, label your work appropriately and let me scroll on to something else. That True did exhibit self-control, that Olivia insisted on it until the emotional connection felt as strong as the physical gave this Old Biddy a ::sigh:: of contentment, maybe two.

In other words, the romance wasn't rushed and that makes the difference between a book read and a Keeper, for me. Ms. Fresina's writing brings characters to life in interesting situations that are plausible for the time. Her balance of narrative and dialog provides excellent pacing that kept me up too late. Because I want to hang on to Olivia and True, as they are, I probably won't read the rest of this series unless it reaches out and grabs me with a "can't resist trope" in one of the books. I am most appreciative of the fact there was NO epilogue. How wonderful it is to close a file, close your eyes and allow characters to continue to weave their magic over you. This book is definitely a keeper for me.

for a slightly expanded review of this book and others Pagetraveler E-Book Reviews

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## Mei says

It took me ages to read this book and not because it was bad, but because I have as guests my BFF and her husband and I'm enjoying spoiling them with food, shopping, etc! LOL

Back to the book...

It is one of the strangest love stories I've read!

The heroine is a kind of repressed by her family I-need-to-be-needed wallflower and the hero is an overbearing rich self-made caveman.

But... she's a wallflower with character! She's not afraid to voice her opinion. I enjoyed her flaying the hero with her very prim and proper words! LOL

But... he's a caveman with a tender spot. He deeply cares for his children. He's absolutely honest and doesn't have any problem voicing his wants and needs. I enjoyed how he was able to confuse our not-so-shy wallflower! LOL

It was a nice and fun read! I'm curious to read the next one! :)

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## Theresa says

### **Long journey to an abrupt ending.**

About fifty percent of this book is slow-moving and tedious especially since it is told from two perspectives, that of Olivia and True. While the author does a better job than some with this double perspective, I still found it repetitive. The best written parts were True's flashbacks to his abandonment and tumultuous fight for survival as a feral child essentially raised by animals.

I never understood Olivia's passivity with regard to the members of her family who seemed to go out of their way to criticize and demean her. I know that women weren't as likely to speak up for themselves during this era, but her meekness seems extreme to me. I really didn't understand the motivations for two of her three marriages and I didn't completely understand why she held herself apart from True quite as long as she did. In short, Olivia's character didn't make a lot of sense to me.

The pace last half of the book picks up with a couple of revelations and a little mystery. I suppose what put me off was what felt like an abrupt ending. As long as it took to develop the relationship between True and Olivia it was almost as if the author got tired of writing and wanted the book to just end. I have to say that the suddenness of the ending and the unemotional nature of it left me flatly disappointed.

Bottom line: I liked the character of True, found Olivia fairly uninteresting and was left with a strong feeling of dissatisfaction when the story ended.

## **maggieandteddy says**

I haven't read many HR books lately. I'm very happy to have picked this one to read. Very original style- the story grabbed me from the start. The H, True, and the h, Olivia "meet" each other on the very first page. It's 1832, and True knocks Olivia over and proceeds to yell at her for getting in his way. Olivia recognizes True Deverell-everyone knows (of) True Deverell! Olivia is warned to stay away from him.

Olivia is pretty much told what to do by virtually everyone in her family. Olivia does have a spunky side to her, which gets her criticized even more. Ladies just don't talk and act like Olivia!

Ten years later, Olivia is 28 and widowed for the 3RD TIME! Olivia's father has passed away and her step brother Christopher continues to "look after" her. He really just bosses her around and demeans her. She's 'just a woman' is all she ever hears. Olivia realizes that she may never find love again. Her father's business partner Mr Chalke finds her a position as a secretary to True Deverell, at his estate in Cornwall. True's estate is very remote, on a rocky cliff isolated by the high tides.

There is a lot of similarities to Jane Eyre. I really enjoyed that about the book. The two tortured souls really applied to True and Olivia. The POV is 3rd person, alternating between True and Olivia-it was done seamlessly -so the transition flowed very well. Olivia dresses very drab and has old beat up shoes-which drives True to distraction.

He starts to discretely notice that Olivia is hiding her beauty. True hired Olivia to write his memoirs for his many children. He knows that there are many rumors about him and wants his real (True) story told. True has adult children from his exwife Charlotte, whom he divorced 10 years before. He also has children from his deceased mistress. Charlotte is a real bitch and continues to throw verbal barbs at True. Fortunately, she doesn't live near True's Cornwall estate.

There was a little slow part in the middle when True and Olivia were fighting their attraction to each other. Some mundane details dragged the story a little. The steam was in the second half.

The last 1/3 of the book picked up and had some suspense element to it. The ironic twist again parallels Jane Eyre. There is an HFN/HEA. I will probably read the second book Storm which is about one of True's illegitimate sons. I liked Storm's role in this book, so I'm curious about his book.

I took off for some modern phrases: "letting it slide", etc. I don't mind when there's some modern adaptations, but that was a big stand out. The weak climatic confrontation at the end was disappointing, IMO.

I wanted MORE for Olivia and for True. The characters were the strong point for me.

4.5 stars.

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## **Jennifer says**

The pacing was a little off (that was quite the abrupt and dramatic ending!) but I really enjoyed these characters and their banter.

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## **Quinn Fforde says**

Things were going along reasonably well with lots of clever dialogue until about the 75% mark. Then it was

like everything had to hurry up and end right this second. Pity.

ETA: I just reread it and upped my rating from 3 to 4 stars. I enjoyed it more the second time, particularly since I am reading through the series.

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## **PSUDST says**

Loved the heroine, Olivia is this book! She was smart, determined, and had gumption.

The hero, True, was infantile, spoiled, and entitled. I didn't warm up to him until the final three or four chapters.

Overall, a really good story with fantastic writing and hardly any typos! Shameful that that has to be a thing in reviews nowadays but...(insert shrug here).

I couldn't find it in me to care about anyone in True's family with the exception of Storm, so I might read his story for grins and giggles.

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## **Wollstonecraftmegirl says**

This was very good. Great characters, well done romance, steamy, funny, with some lovely writing - language and dialogue. Such a pleasant surprise. Thank you for the rec, Lyuda.

Not too much happens in this book, it's very character driven, but it all works because they're both so very, very good.

True (I like this book so much, I can't even hate the name) is a proper scoundrel, a rake, a working-class boy done good. And he's actually all those things, rather than just apparently all of those things.

Olivia is a plain, self-possessed, thrice widow trying to make the best of difficult circumstances. She's clever, wry and witty and a little undone around the edges by life. She is EveryWoman, or at least Every British Woman, "*She really couldn't see what all the fuss was about. A storm in a teacup. Oops, the tea! Where was her mind today?*"

Olivia, always intrigued by True, takes a job as his secretary, directed to take a note of his scandalous life story. And so, the rake is slowly undone by the plain widow. And it somehow avoids cliché! Miracle. It's a great thing to watch True realise that there is a woman for him after all, unravelling all his long held beliefs and hang ups, and to see Olivia live and love after a series of trials. The romance is done wonderfully well. And the chemistry is off the charts (the latter undoubtedly being connected to the former, and vice versa).

The writing is often funny (gently so, but it amused me), as are some of the incidents (I am juvenile enough to find the image of a naked man with a bonnet tied around his tackle giggle-worthy).

At points the imagery is rather lovely, almost poetic:

*"The amber tinted image of this woman standing in his scullery, arms above her head, returned again like a flame struck into being, flaring and stretching."*

*"... the moist air clinging to everything like a very fine shroud of damp lace."*

So, why not five stars? It just isn't. It didn't click sufficiently for me and I am not sure I'll re-read it, which is perhaps slightly surprising. Also, for all that chemistry, the consummation was: a let down.

Definitely returning to Fresina though.

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## **Cristina says**

**4.5 stars**

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## **Lyuda says**

This was a truly enjoyable story. I've not read this author before but when all three of my trusted Amazon reviewers gave this book a 5-star rating, I knew it was something special. And I wasn't disappointed. I must say that despite my many HR reads, the story strikes me as totally unique and made so by very unconventional characters and imaginative, lyrical writing.

Olivia Monday, our heroine, is a widow who took a secretary position in order to provide for herself and not to be a burden or at beck and call of her step-brother. She is a widow not once, not twice, but three times! She was married "twelve days the first time. Three months the second. Almost five years the last time." Talk about bad luck or something else, something that brought her to attention of Inspector O'Grady of the London Metropolitan Police. Yes, there is a little mystery there but mostly the story is a wonderful romance made it so by not only the unconventional heroine but by the hero most would find difficult not to fall in love with.

True Deverell is a divorced man with a brood of eight children and at least two gun-shot wounds. He is a truly self-made man, rich as Croesus, an owner of an exclusive gaming club. Discovered on a beach as a baby with nothing to identify him, he was not taken by a carrying family but instead was abandoned by his rescuers again. His childhood was one of the most horrific I ever encountered. But instead of defeating him, it made him stronger, more admirable. I like that the author didn't dwell on the hero's past but instead concentrated on the man he is. He is perceptive, honest, and brilliant. He is a force of nature. His love for his children, or in his words "his litter", is truly admirable.

When True's decision to write a memoir brought the characters together, I had hard time deciding what I loved the most: wonderful humor, exquisite sensuality, slow building affection, unparalleled witticism, delicious dialog. And I can go on and on....

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention fantastic writing again.

The only criticism I have is of the book cover. Although beautiful, it depicts a much younger man and not our forty-something year old hero.

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## **Melanie A. says**

Even if it usually involves a whole lot of DNFing, I like taking chances on new-to-me-authors, and this time I got lucky and hit the jackpot! I loved this book! It was everything a good historical romance should be, but with the added bonus of having a bit of an edge to it.

The writing was wonderful - full of great vocabulary and expressions, and Ms. Fresina really took the time to build True and Olivia's relationship. I thoroughly enjoyed their long, banter-filled conversations that had me laughing out loud quite a few times. And the characters themselves! Both True and Olivia were strong, complex, and set in their ways, and I loved watching them evolve as they came to grips with their feelings for each other.

Perhaps if I had to complain, it would be about the way the sub-plot was wrapped up in the very end. But don't let that put you off, because the vast majority of this story was well-thought out and revealed perfectly. A great find!

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## **Blackjack says**

This book fell more into the B range for me, surprisingly, though it did have a number of unique traits that definitely pushes it out of the realm of ordinary romances. Olivia Monday, the heroine, is a wonderful contrast of pragmatic to a fault but romantic and long suffering too. She's also a rather buttoned up lady on the outside while internally lusty and irreverent. I liked her! I also never really could anticipate how she was going to react, what she was going to do, or how she was going to feel at any given moment. Her back story is equally a mix of outrageous traits and prosaic middle class life. She wants a quiet life being useful to a husband, preferably one she loves, but she's been married three times and she's still in her twenties. The biggest surprise though is that all of her husbands have died mysteriously, bringing her to the attention of a police inspector who is absolutely convinced she's a black widow. It's a bit of an odd book and I haven't even gotten to the hero yet. True Deverall (and no, I never warmed to the name) is equally an enigma and a misfit in his world and quite outrageous in many ways. He's the father of umpteen children, of which I lost count, and from different mothers. He's a self-made wealthy man with a mythical upbringing, some of it real and some imagined, though discerning the difference is a challenge. He's at times gentlemanly and at times thoroughly coarse. Olivia and True are in the end perfectly suited.

While I really did like the incongruities of the characters here, I had some difficulty with the timing and pacing of the story. Some scenes, especially long conversations between Olivia and True, would go on for endless numbers of pages of back and forth witticisms and arguments that felt like being a spectator of a ping pong match, and other scenes that appeared important to the plot would take place within a page or two. Crucial plot points would end abruptly and not return for ages, if at all. I found events at the end of the novel very significant to the book itself but cut short and left open ended. All of this fits in a way with the oddness of the characters here but left me feeling unsettled. I did think that from a romance perspective though, the ending strikes the perfect note.

I would recommend it despite some flaw that bothered me, especially to readers who enjoy unusual romances from an author with a very distinctive voice.

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