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Melissa Foster

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This sassy, spirited baker is fine with heat—but is her fake fiancé too hot to handle?

Bakery owner Willow Dalton's friendship with Zane Walker has always been a bit complicated. Now a scrumptiously hot A-list actor, Zane's always had a reputation as player. He's arrogant, and he's definitely not boyfriend material. Sure, he did Willow a favor by agreeing to take her virginity before college, but is that reason enough to go along with a fake engagement a decade later—even if it comes with a real diamond ring?

Zane should have known better. Nothing involving Willow has ever been easy. Still, he knows her better than anyone, and becoming America's hottest new leading man means cleaning up his reputation. An “engagement” to curvy, sass-mouthed Willow is the perfect PR move . . . provided no one gets hurt.

Now Zane and Willow's little white lie has turned into an irresistible recipe for sweet temptation. And soon no one will be able to tell the difference between their fake engagement or the real thing—including them.

The Real Thing Details

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Author : Melissa Foster

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Whitney says

It always hurts my heart when I have to give a book a low rating and a somewhat bad review. It is never fun. However, I vowed to myself that I would always be honest to myself and to potential readers. So here it is: this book fell flat for me.

The good news is that I totally think it is just my personal preference. There doesn't seem to be any major editing issues or plot holes. I just could not stomach the sickly sweet storyline, the too-perfect alpha and heroine, and the *conflict* that wasn't actually a conflict. Because I feel the need to justify my rating, let me explain.

Insta-love. For me, there is nothing worse than insta-love; don't get that confused with insta-lust. They are two totally different things. I love insta-lust. A one nightstand that slowly becomes something *more* is so hot. There is nothing hotter than when two characters have to have each other right then and there. Insta-love, however, kills the romance. Why write a romance novel when the characters are going to be in love from the first meeting? It limits the story. You know why? Because the reader automatically knows that they are going to be fighting this feeling because they don't believe in love at first sight. And that leads me to the...

Conflict. It is so tragic to be in love. *Yes, that statement is dripping with sarcasm.* Since when did being in love become a conflict? Especially when said conflict occurs in a romance novel. The only time this should be an issue is when it is forbidden love or a messy love triangle. I personally get annoyed when the MCs push each other away because they shouldn't be in love. *Who says that they shouldn't love each other!?* It is also super annoying when the author doesn't really explain what the MC is feeling. Are they scared of getting hurt? Have they been hurt in the past? Did they never see themselves settling down? Nope, they just don't think that they should have feelings for one another so soon because it's wrong. *Alrighty then.*

The lovebirds. I already touched on this, but novels that follow this structure usually end up with an extremely annoying couple. The heroine is usually whiny because it is just so exhausting to keep pushing the love of her life away. The hero is usually too-perfect because he will always be there to press the heroine's buttons but also understanding when she turns him away. You can count on him to always chase after her when she runs away. She typically will not understand why she is running away but she just knows that she has to leave. And because they fall in love in chapter two, you will have to read at least fifteen chapters of this nonsense. Finally, when you are trying to figure out how to kill fictional characters, one of them realizes that they just can't live without the other. Then it is all happily ever after. ***gags***

While this book isn't exactly what I listed above, it comes pretty close.

Zane is a playboy actor. Willow is your average curvy baker. He tricks her into meeting up with him so that he can ask her to be his fake fiancé. Willow has been in love with Zane since they both were kids. She agrees to help him out because she loves him. He loves her too, but they aren't suppose to love each other. They are from different worlds. Although, their engagement doesn't *feel* fake. How will they ever be able to break this off without breaking their hearts in the process?

I know. It is just so tragic.

2 stars.

★ Belle The Bibliophile ★ says

My emotions throughout reading this book: Annoyance. Annoyance. Annoyance. 10x magnified as the book progressed.

But anyway, this is just an unpopular opinion. So.... move along people. Nothing to see here.

Lisa Filipe says

I simply adored the heck out of THE REAL THING, the new release from Melissa Foster and the first in the Sugar Lake series. I love all of Melissa's romances. Her writing is always so emotional and heartwarming and dare I say steamy! In THE REAL THING, she brings a whole new element onto the pages with hilarious banter and sexual chemistry that had my kindle sizzling!

Zane and Willow have a complicated history which becomes all the more complicated when he asks her to play his "fiancee" to help his reputation with the movie folks. With the potential boost for her catering/bakery business, she agrees, and so begins the laugh-out-loud fun! But we can't leave out the Melissa Foster steam factor, it was there and it was HOT!

I am loving the setting of Sweetwater, and I can't wait to read the next book which features Willow's sister Bridgette. Fans of Jill Shalvis (Lucky Harbor), and Toni Blake (Destiny) need to make this their next must read!

Amy says

4.5 Sweet Stars!

"We're good at crossing lines, remember?" "Cross this line with me, Willow."

"If alpha male had a scent, it would smell like Zane Walker, rugged and musky, with an underlying hint of come-hither and a dash of panty-melting lust."

"Zane didn't just kiss Willow; he possessed her with his arms, his hands, his wicked tongue. He delved into the recesses of her mouth, unleashing a surge of heat that first flooded, then consumed her from the inside out. She had almost forgotten what a real kiss felt like."

This was such a fun, fun book! I am such a sucker for those friends to lovers/fake relationship type romances and this one totally takes the cake. The Real Thing is wonderfully written, entertaining and is the kind of story that will leave you smiling while pulling at your heartstrings.

The Real Thing is told from dual points of view and is the first book in an exciting new series from author Melissa Foster. From the moment I picked up this book, I couldn't help but be drawn to Zane and Willow. The connection between these two was strong and undeniable. The tension just oozed off the pages and

begged to be explored. Add in one of my favorite troupes, a fake relationship, and you have the recipe for one delicious read.

The Real Thing was absolutely everything that I wanted. It was fun. It was sexy. It was entertaining. The chemistry was real and I loved Zane and Willow together. Sure they weren't perfect and they made their fair share of mistakes, but that's the beauty of love. When you find the real thing, you fight for it...No matter how long it may take before it's finally yours.

Author Melissa Foster has once again delivered a wonderful and unforgettable read. From a fun story-line to a sinful alpha male to the importance of family and an unforgettable love...This book has it all. The Real Thing kicks off a fabulous start to the Sugar Lake Series and I can't wait to read more!

I was provided an ARC copy of this book via the publisher and NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review

Carol [Goodreads Addict] says

The Real Thing is book one in the brand new series, Sugar Lake, by Melissa Foster. This is my first book by Melissa and I wasn't sure what to expect. Would her book be sugary sweet, or have some heat? Would there be humor? The answer to all of these questions is YES!

Willow Dalton grew up in the small town of Sweetwater and loved it there. She was very close to her three sisters, her brother and parents. Willow loved to bake and owned her own bakery, Sweetie Pie Bakery. The only thing missing was a man to love. Willow dated but no one ever measured up to the one man that had always had her heart, Zane Walker.

Willow has known Zane all her life. He was her older brother's best friend and like a part of her family. When she was young she always had a crush on him. Just before she left for college, it was Zane she asked for the biggest favor of her life, to take her virginity. But that secret night by the lake was so much more than it was meant to be. It was the night she fell in love.

But Zane's life was not in Sweetwater. He couldn't leave town fast enough when he was old enough. He was now an A-list actor in Los Angeles. He was known for his action films and his playboy lifestyle. But now he wanted to break in to romantic comedy and needed to clean up his reputation. What better way than to come up with a squeaky clean, sweet, small town fiance. Zane would only consider asking one woman to play this role, and that was Willow.

As Zane and Willow prepared for their role, though, memories were unburied and feelings were finally faced. There was a reason neither Zane nor Willow had ever been able to find someone they were interested in. Because no one could ever measure up to the one person they always yearned for.

“She was his every fantasy come true, only better. Because she was Willow, and she was finally his.”

Once Zane finally realized that Willow was the one, was his one and only, this man was seriously swoony. At first, I wasn't sure how I felt about him, asking Willow to play such a role. But when he owned up to his feelings, nothing was going to stop him from proving to Willow that he was the man for her, that he was her man.

“Every day we're together will be more perfect than the last, because every day I'm learning how to be a better man for you.”

But Willow's life was in Sweetwater, and Zane's life was in Los Angeles. His life was crazy filled with paparazzi and fans and autographs. Her life was quiet filled with sugar and cupcakes and frosting. But once Zane spent time with her in her little apartment above her bakery, she couldn't imagine her life without him in it.

“Five minutes would never be enough. A week would never be enough. Loving Zane Walker would take a lifetime. And then some.”

This was such a sweet book. I fell in love with Zane and Willow. And there was some serious sexy times as well, which is a good thing. Zane and Willow had no problem with chemistry and Zane most definitely brought out Willow's inner seductress.

This was such a sweet start to this series (pun intended) and I look forward to more. The next book will be about Willow's sister, Bridgette in Only For You.

“Willow was his. Willow was home.”

Diana says

3.75 stars (audiobook)

I could really kick myself for not listening to audiobooks sooner. I love how convenient it is to pop a book on and do housework, yardwork and running errands, Although I had to remember that when I was out in public, not to crack up laughing, which I did happen a few times.

The narrator (John Lane) has a sexy as hell voice, and it was perfect for what I imagined the hero, Zane, to sound like. I did have a slight niggle when he did the heroine's voice. His voice made Willow sound exasperated or annoyed all the time. However, I did get used to it and it didn't bother my enjoyment of the book.

The Real Thing is book 1 in the Sugar Lake series, following the Dalton siblings. This book is about Willow

and Zane, who is her childhood crush and her brother's best friend. Willow has been in love with Zane forever, but thought he didn't feel the same way, especially since he is a big shot movie star and is pictured with beautiful women all the time. It turns out there is more to the story than what she thought.

Zane Walker is back in his home town to shoot a few scenes in his upcoming movie. He convinces Meredith to be his "fake fiancé" so the press will stop hounding him. It isn't long before their true feelings are revealed and the struggle of figuring what happens next. Willow owns a bakery, and Zane lives in LA. How can they manage a real relationship?

This was definitely a sweet read. Even though friends to lovers isn't my favorite trope, I did enjoy swoon worthy Zane and his love for Willow. There were times that Willow made me roll my eyes, but she was likeable enough. The side characters, mainly the Dalton family, were sweet and funny and I am looking forward to continuing the series.

Carvanz says

Willow and Zane have been friends since they were young. He did her the favor of removing her virginity and then stuck by the rules she had laid out afterwards. Now, ten years later, he's cashing in the favor. He needs to repair his reputation as a playboy A-list actor and the only woman he wants to pretend to be his fiancée is Willow. It's always been Willow. She's his real thing and this story showcases how this couple moves from a friendship into a romantic relationship.

I loved Willow and Zane! As individuals they were both sincere and likable. As a couple they were intense, engaging and so hot I'm sure my Kindle was scorched. This story has a crew of secondary characters that will be getting their own stories and there's not one of them I'm not anxious to read about.

I'm relatively new to the Melissa Foster bandwagon, but OMG...I'm so glad I was able to hop on!

ARC provided by NetGalley

Dual POV

Safety issues – they slept together once when they were young and they each have other relationships afterwards but once together as a current couple there is no one else

No apparent triggers

Alexandra Harris says

Not for me

I tried hard to like this story, and I'm sure it's great for others but just not my cup of tea. I like different styles of dialog, love and romance than what this author wrote. Not that it's bad, just not meant for me. If you give it a try I hope you have better luck :)

Irene says

4 Sweet Stars

The Real Thing by Melissa Foster was a sweet, entertaining and enjoyable read.

When I'm in the mood for low angst and high romance my go to author is Melissa Foster. I love how she always manages to bring out the feels with her words and characters.

In The Real Thing she's done it again, a sweet and romantic storyline, characters that will make you swoon, but also frustrate you and then leave you with a huge satisfying smile when they eventually get their happily everafter.

Willow and Zane, they were likable, endearing characters that I easily connected with and I loved watching their fake relationship turn into the real thing.

These two had a strong attraction and their chemistry was smoking!

The Real Thing is a lovely read and a great start to the Sugar Lake series. Looking forward to Only for You which is due for release December 5th.

Buy Links

→KINDLE: http://smarturl.it/TRT4_KINDLE

→PAPERBACK: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1542045819>

Thank you to Montlake Romance for the advance copy in exchange for my honest thoughts.

Wendy'sThoughts says

4 Real Love Stars

* * * * *Spoiler Free*

Melissa Foster is someone who knows what she is doing... she creates situations that warm our hearts as we watch them unfold. She is the Queen of Heartwarming Series and every time I crack open one of her books, I know I will be taken to a place I won't want to leave.

The Real Thing is a new series that focuses on a hidden love that becomes front and center when movie star long time "friend", Zane Walker, needs a "Cover Fiancee." He needs this to clean up his reputation. The only person he can truly trust is a girl who came to him... asking for a favor of a lifetime long ago.

Willow Dalton has always had a soft spot for Zane... yet sometimes his arrogance and confidence has driven her nuts. They have this friend/enemy thing happening... which actually hides the true/real feelings they both have.

When Willow drives at breakneck speed to a resort thinking she is about to have the interview of her career, she has no idea how life changing it actually will be. She has been working so hard to make her bakery a success and closing a contract with the resort would take her to the next level.

With all her hopes tied up with this opportunity, she is in no mood for anything to go wrong...

Of course, they do...and the icing on the cake... Zane is responsible for her being there in the first place! When he comes clean as to why she is really at the resort, he presents her with a proposal... She will get the exposure her bakery needs and he will have a trusted friend helping him "clean up his act" as his pretend fiancee.

After all...She owes him....

This is a sweet story done well by Melissa Foster. We get all the yummy bits of two people who have cared for each other all along.

A gifted copy was provided by author/publisher for an honest review.

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Tijuana *BookTwinsReviews* says

This was such a sweet read! Great characters, one of my favorite tropes, and a fun storyline made this a quite enjoyable read. In true Melissa Foster style, **The Real Thing** is both sassy and sweet!

Here's the breakdown: Willow and Zane grew up together in a small town. They practically grew up together. Once Zane leaves town to pursue his dream of acting, their relationship changes. They change, but remain in contact. When the Zane needs helps cleaning up his movie star man-whore reputation, he calls on the one person he knows will agree to help him...Willow.

What I enjoyed: I'm a sucker for friends to lovers and fake fiancé romances. When the reader knows the couple has the hots for one another even if they try to avoid acting on those impulses, it's like the best tease EVER. The main characters are also great. They grew up with one another and share a special history. Because of that, it was really easy to root for their love affair. Their chemistry was off the charts. Zane is a bit cocky and Willow is as sassy as they come. I'm a sucker for both!

Overall, this was a super fun read! I recommend it to romance lovers who favor, fake relationships, friends to lovers, and brother's best friends tropes.

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Natalie The Biblioholic says

Willow and Zane have known each other since they were kids. Zane happens to be best friends with her older brother, Ben. He spent more time at their house than his own dysfunctional one and was seen as a member of the family. Well, to everyone but Willow. She's been crushing on him for ages. When he left town to make it big as a Hollywood actor, they remained in touch. They were not only really good friends, but they shared a secret (he was her first). When Zane needs to clean up his image as a renowned player, he looks to Willow to help him out. What happens when a fake engagement leads to real love?

When I'm looking for sweet, Melissa Foster is definitely at the top of my list. Her heroes are swoon-worthy and her heroines have spunk and more than prove that they're a match for their men. Her stories are full of humor, family, friends, romance, good times and feel goods. *The Real Thing* gave me all of that and more and is worthy of a one-click!

Release Date: September 5, 2017

Genre: Contemporary Romance

POV: Dual - 3rd person

Heat: 3 out of 5

Type: Standalone - Book 1 of the Sugar Lake series

.Under the pages says

Review available at Under the Pages.

Dali says

A wonderfully sweet second chance love story that was equal parts swoony and sexy. Melissa Foster fans will fall in love with Willow and Zane and go nuts over this new series.

I have only read a couple of Melissa Foster's book and would venture into characterizing her stories as low drama high voltage swoony sexiness. They're easy to read with just the right amount of steam and heart that support a strong connection between the main characters. The Real Thing is Zane and Willow's story which unfolds in the small town of Sweetwater. It is one full of friendship, desire and affection as well as the obstacles that accompany a second chance at love.

“His arms pushed beneath her, cradling her body against his, until even air couldn’t fit between them. Their mouths came together as they began to move, and he kissed her so deeply, so lovingly, years of pent-up emotions came rushing forward.”

Willow Dalton and Zane Walker fell in love when they were so young they couldn’t have possibly understood the concept but they never expressed their feelings toward the other. He was her older brother’s best friend, the boy who spent so much time at her place he could practically be part of the family. They’ve always been close friends and before she went to college she asked him to be her first but then he moved to LA to become an A-list actor and turned into a well-known player. So why is he back a decade later asking her to be his fake fiancée?

Zane thought his decision to clean up his playboy name by asking Willow to help out was harmless enough and solely for public relations purposes, but as soon as she’s in his arms pretending, all the feelings of familiarity, intimacy and love they’d never acknowledged before flood them, lines get blurred and neither can distinguish between what’s real and what’s fake. But do they really want to?

“I’m about as imperfect as they come, but my love for you is real.”

The closeness between Zane and Willow practically leaps from the page. They were cute and sweet and sexy. It was wonderful and heartwarming to see these two get their second chance at a love that had been latent for years and how their relationship helped Zane find his life’s purpose.

Zane realizes he’s deeply in love with Willow and would do just about anything to be with her. He goes big with everything he does to convince her to give them a chance and the things he says are super sweet and cheesy. He was incredibly endearing. And let’s not forget about the sizzling chemistry between them! I really enjoyed how Melissa explores all the ties that bind them starting from a young age and the lasting power of their love.

“For years they’d kept each other at arm’s length, and now heat and the past and something much bigger seemed to twine together, tethering them with an unbreakable bond.”

And although I personally don’t have a big sweet tooth and like stories with a bit more drama, I found Zane and Willow’s journey very enjoyable, smiling and swooning throughout their story and can’t wait to read about Willow’s brother and sisters.

The Real Thing is the first book in Sugar Lake series by *Melissa Foster*. It is a full length second chance romance that is easy to read with likeable characters, very little drama a whole lot of sexy sweetness. It has a happy ending and is told from both points of view.

* I was given an ARC of this book courtesy of the author via NetGalley. The excerpts taken are from that copy. *

Amazon -> <http://amzn.to/2wJpfPq>

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Debbie Oliphant says

This was a sweet story and the first in the new Sugar Lake series. While this centers around Zane and Willow, you are introduced to many characters whose tale will propel the series.

Zane is a successful actor who is in desperate need of a "character" makeover. It would appear that he does not like the playboy reputation and furthermore, it could hurt his career. He comes up with a plan to help soften his image but it will require the consent of a childhood friend. Enter Willow. She has had a crush on Zane since she was a little girl, and Zane is also responsible for being her first, but it was a one-time event. Her heart was broken.

Willow has since moved on and has worked hard running her own bakery. She has a potential new client that can help boost income but soon learns that the client is Zane. Zane pleads with her to help him and convinces her that the exposure can put her bakery on the map. She goes along with the plan and as they spend time together, the old feelings start coming back. What surprises her is that Zane, too, has feelings for her. Will they follow their heart or allow more time to pass them by?

This was a fun, quick read and the pace was pretty consistent throughout. If you are a fan of Ms. Fosters, this will not disappoint.
