



Sorrow Road

Julia Keller

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From the small towns of Appalachia they came, the young men who joined the fight for liberty in World War II. Now they are elderly, and some of them—like Harmon Strayer, father of prosecutor Bell Elkins's former law school classmate—suffer from Alzheimer's. When Harmon dies in an Alzheimer's care facility from what appear to be natural causes, Bell confronts a mystery that brims with questions about memory, grief and the lethal cost of burying the past. During a winter of record snow and cold, Bell and the people of Acker's Gap, West Virginia, face isolation and hardship—and the threat from a killer who preys upon the old and the sick and the helpless.

Sorrow Road Details

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Author : Julia Keller

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From Reader Review Sorrow Road for online ebook

Zoe says

This review and more can be found on my blog at www.whatsbetterthanbooks.com

This is an atmospheric, character-driven, murder mystery that reminds us that sometimes one reckless event can have long-lasting repercussions.

The plot is well developed, suspenseful, and tragic. The writing is well done and remarkably descriptive. And the characters are highly complex, damaged, and in some cases depraved.

Although this is not an extremely fast-paced thriller, it is definitely entertaining and an enjoyable read.

Thank you to NetGalley, especially St. Martin's Press, for providing me with a copy in exchange for an honest review.

Laura Thomas Boren says

Really 3.5 stars. This is Book #5 in a series. Great characters and setting. The story has a mostly sad quality. Even the fairly predictable reason for the crimes is just, bottom line, sad.

But that is often how real life is. It's not that shocking why someone does a very bad thing, but old hurts and fears, going back to childhood and sometimes even earlier, can influence all of us, to the banality of evil acts.

The reason it is under 4 stars is the stilted language and odd choice to avoid obvious and reasonable contractions. Not sure if this is the fault of the writer or editor (or both!), but had someone read the book out loud, the cadence of the writing would have helped determine where it was appropriate to put in contractions, and where they shouldn't have been used.

I still found the story well told and will go back to the beginning of the series, but this stilted language issue is, quite honestly, distracting. If you read this, dear Julia Keller, this is a relatively easy fix. Seriously, do your readers a solid.

Elvan says

ARC received from publisher via NetGalley

It's never a good sign when I keep setting aside a book I am reading and Sorrow Road is one of those kind of reads. When I selected this book from NetGalley I did not realize it was the fifth in the Bell Elkins series and that was my mistake. It's clear to this reader that to develop a love for this small town West Virginian prosecutor you are advised to read books one through four.

The plot was complex enough with Belle asked by a college classmate and rival to investigate the nursing home where her beloved father died under mysterious circumstances. There are some flashbacks to three local boys who ran rough through the town and enlisted in the navy to get away from their covered up crimes. There is also a plot involving Belle's daughter Carla who returns from the city suffering from PTSD thanks to a hostage situation in a previous novel. It's hard to bond with a character you know little about. I never warmed up to Carla.

Add in a ex-husband, a currently spurned boyfriend and a setting of bleak winter storms and dangerous roads and I struggled to stay engaged or concerned for the welfare of any of the main players.

I recommend you read this series from the first novel. Julia Keller writes well and knowing the back stories of her main characters is sure to enhance your enjoyment of her novels. Jumping into the story in the middle of a winter storm on many a hot August read was not a great move on my part.

Liz says

I had read the first two Bell Atkins books by Julia Keller and found them interesting. So I was pleased to be offered the fifth book in the series by netgalley.

There are several story lines here. The backstory of the men who fought in WWII, Bell's daughter's story concerning her PTSD and the actual mystery, involving the death of one of those WWII survivors and his daughter's belief it was murder. Keller draws out each of these stories. This isn't a fast paced book. It's richly detailed. Keller does an especially good job of describing West Virginia, not just the economy, but the people, the roads, the weather, the history. There is truly a sense of place with this book.

The characters are fully fleshed out, even the ones that aren't vital to the story. Keller takes the time to spell out the relationships. Again, she makes you understand the small town atmosphere and how inter-connected everyone is. It's all about family, memory and past sins. I will definitely be seeking out books three and four in this series.

My thanks to netgalley for providing me an advance copy of this book.

Lynn says

Sorrow Road is the fifth entry in the Bell Elkins series. Bell is a prosecutor in a small town in West Virginia. Julia Keller takes an unflinching look at the poverty in this area. When people have little money, desperation can take control.

Bell is contacted by a high powered attorney who is a former law school classmate. The two have a prickly relationship. Darlene Strayer's father was a resident of a long term care facility when he passed away. Darlene feels there was foul play involved with his death. Bell is dismissive, the elderly man had suffered from Alzheimer's for some time. When Darlene also dies, her partner contacts Bell demanding she investigate. Reluctantly, Bell pokes around and is soon suspicious that something could be wrong. The story

moves back and forth between WW II and the present day. Although dual story lines are a favourite of mine, I preferred the present day events in this novel.

The books in this series are character driven. Opening one is like catching up with old friends. Highly recommend new readers start with the first book, *A Killing in the Hills*, to get maximum enjoyment out of subsequent books. *Sorrow Road* does refer to circumstances that occurred in Keller's debut.

Barbara Nutting says

That's enough of West Virginia for me for awhile. This was better than the last one and it actually ended - no "I've got to read the next one to see what happens." It was a cruel, rude look at Alzheimer's. She makes it sound like West Virginia is only filled with sleazy bars, obese men and women, rednecks, abusive fathers and slutty mothers - doesn't make you want to visit.

This is her second theme of "crimes" that would more and likely not be punished, but made the participants live lives of guilt and/or pain. Shirley certainly would have been exonerated and these three boys would never have gone to jail - they were 12 years old!! The moral is to tell the truth, but then we'd have not had two books.

The author made me feel I was watching the Weather Channel - okay, it's snowing, we don't need page after page describing it.

Again what I consider editing errors - how can Nick be a demon with a shovel with his bad arm? Who is paying to keep Bill Ferris in this fancy home? Both kids hate him. What young girl is going to invite a 50 year old man to sit in her car in a raunchy bar parking lot and then fall for him? These guys seem way to active for 90 years old. Too much garbage that should have been cleaned up.

Claire Talbot says

A good mystery with interesting characters -

Read Across the States: West Virginia

Christine says

I am the biggest fan of the Bell Elkins series by Julia Keller. I was so excited to get my hands on *Sorrow Road* to catch up with Bell.

For those of you yet to discover this amazing legal crime series, this is a little background. This is crime at its best. Crime with a social conscience, American style. Bell Elkins is an attorney working in small town America. She is a divorced mother, in her forties. Bell lives in Acker's Gap, a town that has been heavily impacted by economic decline and poverty. This is a place of neglect; of unemployment and of drug and alcohol abuse. She chooses to live there and to practice law. Bell is at the heart of the community. The former sheriff, Nick Fogelson, has been in the background supporting Bell emotionally, since she was a

looked after child in the care system. Sorrow Road is the fifth book in this acclaimed series.

In this instalment, Bell becomes embroiled in the mystery of a death at a memory care facility. This is what we would call a nursing care home or elderly mentally infirm (EMI) home in the UK. A vulnerable elderly man dies. He was suffering from Alzheimers. On the surface, it looks like this was the death of a man at the end of his natural life. His daughter is very suspicious and asks Bell to look into this. She is an acquaintance of Bell's from university.

At the same time, we get the fascinating historical story of three male friends as they grow up in 1930s America, go to war and build their lives. These men are linked by tragedy. What happened to them in their youth?

Bell's personal life becomes complicated. Her daughter, Carla, turns up on her door step. Bell's daughter is suffering and hiding her inner turmoil. She has PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). Carla is at breaking point. She is still recovering from the aftermath of the murder of her friend. Returning to be with her mother, she is trying to find a way forward.

As usual, Julia Keller shows her awareness and understanding of the darker side of life. We see the repercussions of terrible events, in the short term and longer term. For Carla, it is hard for her to sleep and function after the events of a few years ago. For three young men from the 1930s, their lives have been shaped by one hidden event. Life has a way of revealing secrets. The truth comes out. Keller shows us that moments in life can have long term consequences.

Sorrow Road was a pleasure to read. Outstanding crime, as you would expect from Julia Keller. Powerful, wintry cold and bleak. The world of Bell Elkins is one that stays with you. Recommended!

Carol says

The Hook - A favorite series of mine continues with this 5th entry in the BellElkins Series.

The Line(s) - *"There's no such thing as history," Bell went on. "because it's all still right here. The past never goes away. It's in the air. It's all around you, every second. It's just another name for the present."*

The Sinker - The Bell Elkins Series are mysteries and yes, there are murders, but these play second fiddle to the locale and characters. Acker's Gap, West Virginia is as much a character as Bell herself, a Raythune County Prosecutor.

Keller seemed to get back on track in this latest outing. There is enough development of Bell, her daughter, and her love life while continuing to draw a portrait and reveal the true spirit of the Appalachian Mountains and those that live there.

Sorrow Road's mystery revolves around the death of an elderly man in a memory care facility. Bell is asked to investigate the fishy death of an old acquaintance's father. This leads to a dual story line of three boys, friends in the pre-World War II era. Secrets abound and it's up to Bell to resolve the issues.

Though there was nothing earth shattering, it is comforting to become absorbed in familiar territory. Sorrow Road is solid entry in an appealing series.

Maureen says

This was a very enjoyable book by Julia Keller. I would rate it the second best in the series, after book one. It was highly atmospheric, set in the dead of a snowy West Virginia winter, with several story lines running at once. I will definitely be looking for the next book in the series!

Julie says

My review for Sorrow Road by Julia Keller will be posted here in the near future. Stay tuned.
3.5 stars

Kristen Tornero says

I was disappointed with this book. It lacked the cohesion of the others in the series.

Melissa says

I love Bell Elkins more with each book. She and Keller's other characters are beautifully drawn, with all the love and pain that come with living. "Sorrow Road" is a compelling mystery that also taps into the sadness and secrecy that can shroud addiction.

Louise says

I LOVED THIS BOOK!

The writing was fluid, it, and the story itself, drew you in quickly. This story had many many levels.....and much to ponder. I had never read anything by the author or about "Bell Elkins". It didn't matter. I understood where she was and how she got there in this novel alone. I will search other books by J Keller. Best book I read in a long time.

It's a mystery, and a saga, and thought provoking...about wars, and poverty and alzheimer's.

Jo says

I really enjoy Julia Keller's mysteries because her novels are full of beautiful prose and fine character development. Set in West Virginia, they shine a light on the troubled area where Keller grew up, a setting of natural beauty beset with unemployment, poverty and drug abuse.

Prosecutor Belfa Elkins was one of the rare residents who escaped Acker's Gap, got a law degree, and decided to come back to make a difference in her troubled home. In Keller's fifth book, *Sorrow Road*, Bell starts looking into whether there is something suspicious about the deaths of a high school friend's father at an Alzheimer's nursing facility. In the meantime, Bell's grown daughter, Carla, comes home to Acker's Gap to face her troubled past. Carla, who as a high school student witnessed the murder of her best friend before she was kidnapped and almost killed herself, is struggling with haunted memories. I enjoy reading mysteries where the protagonist has to face family problems as well as solve murders, and the relationship between Bell and Carla is complex and interesting.

If you haven't read Keller's books yet, I would start with the first of the five-book series, *A Killing in the Hills*. Keller has come to our library twice to speak as part of our Authors Out Loud series, and she was one of the best speakers we have ever had. Her writing reflects her depth of knowledge and insight about life.
