



## A Blessed Event

*Jean Reynolds Page*

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## **A Blessed Event** Jean Reynolds Page

How much is too much to ask of friendship? How long will the bonds of family endure when confronted with swift, unexpected change? These are the intimate questions Jean Reynolds Page poses in *A Blessed Event*, her assured and powerful literary debut.

Joanne Timbro and Darla Stevens have grown up in a small Texas town, their childhood homes separated only by adjoining backyards. Although the families inside these houses have little in common, the two girls find in each other a rare friendship that will take them into their adult lives; a friendship that makes them stronger together than either could be alone.

Then as young women, Darla and Jo enter into an agreement that will startle everyone who cares for them. After years of watching Darla's heartbreak failure to have a baby with her husband, Cal, Joanne agrees to give birth to the child that Darla cannot have on her own.

But in the early morning hours of a warm July morning, everything changes. Joanne, then four months pregnant, is driving a car that veers off the road near the home that Darla shares with Cal. In the days and months that follow, Darla must face for the first time in her memory, the possibility of life without Jo. As Darla tries to uncover the secrets that brought her friend out onto the highway in those dark morning hours, she discovers that she must also fight to keep the baby that was intended to be her child.

With the child's fate hanging in the balance, Darla searches for clues to Jo's strange behavior leading up to the crash. In the process, she discovers truths that hide in her own life: in her marriage, in her closest friendships, and in a past that has suddenly reemerged, full of unfolding secrets.

Tender and heartbreak, hopeful and honest, *A Blessed Event* brings life's everyday experiences into bright focus, contrasting beautifully the pain of suffering with the sublime joys of surviving—and truly living.

## **A Blessed Event Details**

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### Darcy says

This one has all sorts of messed up people, doing all sorts of messed up things. At some point I found myself not liking all the characters, each seemed so petty.

At first I didn't like the flashbacks, but they did allow us to get to know Darla and Joanne better. It was in those flash backs that I especially found myself not liking Joanne, she was so selfish and vain, manipulating everyone around her. It seemed like with each action she found ways to drag Darla down by talking her into going along with her crazy plans. I also wonder if her seemingly innocent remarks that brought about her getting pregnant were planned. With those few actions it seems like she could find a way to make her best friend happy and cause problems in her marriage so that it could just be the two of them.

I like where the characters are at the end, I think it is the best possible resolution for them all.

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### Jessica says

I was annoyed with this book, with what its characters had gotten themselves into, and yet I continued to read it. "What did you think was gonna happen Darla?" "Man up Cal!" These were my thoughts as I read. But I read on and I'm glad I did! A good read that's made me think. And any book that gets me thinking about things is worth my time. I loved the ending!

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### Ruth says

Jo and Darla not only lived in houses whose backyards joined one another but they had been best friends since childhood. Jo is the firecracker whose schemes Darla eagerly takes part in. Now they are grown and Jo's relationship with her father still has not changed for the better. Darla is married and her husband has to share her with Jo. They have a happy life with the exception of their inability to have a child, which Darla wants more than anything. Jo wanting to help her friend, agrees to have a baby for Darla. Just how far would you go for your best friend?

When she is four months pregnant, Jo is involved in a horrific car accident. Facing the possible loss of her best friend, Darla also has to fight to prove that Jo intended her to be the mother of her child. During this process many things come to light that Darla, as close as she was to Jo, had no knowledge of. Can friendships, marriages and families stay intact when there is so much at stake?

The story is very emotional and the characters will make you hate them at times. There is a decent plot with some unexpected twists. The end is certainly not what I thought it would be.

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### Andrea Braun says

This book had a great premise with a lot of potential in how to tell the story. It's about Darla and her husband, Cal, and Darla's best friend, Joanne. Joanne had agreed to be a surrogate for Darla and Cal, but before the baby is born, Joanne is in a car accident that leaves her brain dead. The author could have done so much with this, but most of the book is spent on flashbacks 10 years before when Darla and Joanne were somewhat rebellious teenagers. It's meant to be character development, but they just weren't that interesting. In the present, after the accident, the author spends so much time on Darla's and Cal's walking emotions. Do they want the baby? Will they stay together? Back and forth, back and forth. It just felt like a slog. I really liked the way that the author dealt with the ending of the book; I wish she had drawn that out a little bit more - it felt like it ended so quickly. My other issue is that it really didn't care for any of the main characters, so it was hard to root for anyone.

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### **Melanie says**

2.5 stars from me. It was ok. Wasn't the worst book, just ok. Not much more to say. NEXT...

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### **Amber says**

Great book. Im sure situations that were in this book are much more common than we think. Good read.

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### **Tawny says**

I liked this one, it had me roped in from the first page. One of those what the hell do you do now situations. One of those things you see on the news and you think "Wow, I can see that really happening and those poor people!"

It's good...

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### **Gretchen says**

This book was so sad. It had me hooked from beginning to end. I just could not put it down. Joanne had a lot of things to deal with, and her father was an asshole. I wish I knew more that happened with Cal and what he wanted from Joanne. In the end, I think it was best that Darla and Cal separated.

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### **Pam says**

BEST BOOK EVER!!!! I loved the plot, really just everything about it.

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### **Lisa Helms says**

I loved this book...It pulled me in from page 2.....First book I've read by this author...kind of puts me in mind of Jodi Picoult.....I love her writing style...Once I started I went to work tired as I couldn't put it down.

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### **Joyce Stewart says**

3 ???

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This is a Story about Darla and Jo. Joanne and Darla have been friends, more like sisters, ever since they were nine. They lived nextdoor all through childhood with their yards touching. Darla grew up and married Cal. Joanne, always considered the bad girl, had been thrown out of her parents' house and lived alone with a small dog. But the two were still best friends, still like sisters. Eventually, Joanne agreed to carry a baby for Darla, who was infertile. No doctors were involved. Cal Darla's husband got Joanne pregnant the normal way. To Darla, all seemed right with the world. Then one day Joanne, four or five months pregnant, showed up at Darla's home, needing desperately to say something, but couldn't. She left, agitated. She returned in the middle of the night, in an unexpected way. Joanne had been returning to Darla's home driving like a mad woman and ended up crashing through the bedroom wall. Joanne was brain dead, but the unborn baby was still okay. This is where the Story opens with Jo crashing in the middle of the night into Darla's house. Needless-to-say, that will capture your interest instantly. While brain dead Jo is kept alive by machines in the hospital because she is pregnant, we go through Jo's and Darla's friendships and learn what brought them to this tragic event. The chapters switch back and forth between past and present. At first I found this really annoying. (But it is important to help us understand why they are the way they are today). Darla got Jo to get pregnant by Darla's husband the old fashion way, because Darla can't have children. This has led to trouble in Darla's marriage. Which I don't understand. It was her idea for her husband to make her bestfriend preg so she could have a baby she she desperately wanted. Darla becomes obsessed with finding out what made Jo leave her house in the middle of the night driving like a mad woman and crashing her car through Darla's house. At first Jo's parents want to unhook her from life support and Cal supports their decision. Because Cal doesn't want his secret to come out. Then Jo's estranged parents drop a bombshell: they're suing for custody of Jo's unborn child. But as the biological father, Cal has ultimate rights over the child, and this leads us to a courtroom drama. The method of insemination (Cal did have sex with Jo) and Darla's past relationship with a man who is now a priest (still, he was only in high school when they dated) are introduced as questionable activities in an effort to prove Darla and Cal unfit. More interesting is the psychological damage Jo's accident creates: Darla and Cal's relationship begins to fall apart as Darla becomes obsessed with Jo's frantic last day. The more Darla discovers, the less she seems to know about her best friend. Sexy, untamable Jo was being counseled by a priest, was considering a religious life, was planning to move away after the birth. But the biggest surprise of all is the truth about Jo's relationship with her parents, a passive mother and a violently tempered father who was more caring and complicated than Darla could have imagined. Everything Jo had always led Darla to think about her dad was all a lie. We follow Darla as she comes to terms with losing her best friend, making discoveries about who Jo really was. The only reason I didn't give it 5 stars was somewhere around the middle it was dragging way too much. Became quite boring. I felt like it should have been shorter by about 100 pages. I almost didn't finish it. This is my first book by this author.

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### **Kristin says**

Imagine your wildest dreams have come true and you're about to become a mother for the first time, an idea originally thought impossible due to your medical condition, but your best friend is willing to be the egg donor and carry your child. 5 months into the pregnancy, Darla's dream world is shattered when her pregnant best friend Jo's car careens into her bedroom, severely injuring Jo, but leaving the fetus unharmed. Darla is left with many questions including why Jo was out driving at a high rate of speed late at night, whether Jo's injuries will prevent her from carrying the baby to term, and should Jo die, who gets custody of the baby since Darla has no biological link to it?

Page spends the entire book answering the 1st and 3rd questions, yet leaves the 2nd hanging in thin air. Most of the books I gravitate towards would focus on the 2nd question and the ethical implications of keeping a comatose woman alive to save her unborn child, but Page chose not to, though I couldn't tell if it was voluntary or involuntary. Instead, she alrenates her chapters between the current day and the strains the custody battle puts on Darla's marriage (her husband is the father, and the baby was conceived the 'natural way' at Darla's request) and relationship with Jo's parents who are her legal next of kin, and the past as Darla and Jo progress from wild teenagers in the 1970s to lifelong friends whose paths diverge but they feel most complete when they're together.

I enjoyed the past-mixed-with-present approach, as the friendship is a very complex one and not somthing that could be summarized in one chapter, leaving the rest of the book in the present. Jo is the more free-spirited of the two, perhaps in an act of rebellion against her controlling father, whereas Darla grew up in a loving home and takes a more traditional path in life by enrolling in college and getting married. Even so, the two always turn to each other when times get rough, and Darla finds herself trying to balance her and her husband's needs with Jo's wishes, when she's no longer certain what those wishes were, and Jo isn't awake to tell her.

Overall, I thought it was a good book, but a little lacking in drama and it came out dry at times because Page kept hashing out the same details over and over, and the one plot twist she alluded to early in the book that I thought would be relevant later, never came. Instead, I was constantly reminded that the women liked to drink, smoke, and do the occassional drug (especially Jo) when they find themselves in a tough situation, and it occurs regardless of whether they're together, apart, or with others. Then, if that doesn't work, they turn to religion. Just felt like a weird conflict to me that the author kept bringing up the substance abuse and religion over and over, when the two are often exclusive of the other.

Not sure I'd read other books by this author, there was a preview of her next work at the end of this book, and it felt very similar to me, but without the medical context in the background.

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### **Sarah says**

Strange. Hard to find a book these days with a unique plot.

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### **Tammie says**

Very emotional book on many levels. Lots of characters and their emotional baggage to sort thru. I didn't find that there was enough substance to really feel pulled into this story and yet it left so many lose ends while still coming up with a reasonably acceptable ending.

Worth reading but won't make it onto my favorite list.

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## **Wendy Welch says**

My husband and I run a used bookshop. One of the first things a used bookshop owner learns is how hard it is to sell hardback fiction. Even worse is if the hardback has no dust jacket, just the black cover with the gold letters on the spine so often used when a colorful dust jacket is going to be added. (Think chick lit.)

So one of my regular tasks at the bookstore when we run out of shelf space in a particular genre is to cull things that haven't sold in a year, and put them on our quick trade shelf, or outside in our free books bin.

I closed in on "A Blessed Event" as a black-spined hanger-on and hauled it out of our Chick Lit section. Thinking it might be one of those horrid romances where the goal is a baby, I opened it to check. Nope, it had an acknowledgements page. Okay, I started reading.

And kept reading.

It had a great opening line, and it built from there, steadily. For about 40 pages I was enthralled, letting the shop run itself around me.

I took it upstairs and put it in the ubiquitous stack by the bed. And for the first two nights, I was intrigued.

But what started as a fast-paced and gripping human condition novel devolved into a character study. How many dysfunctional characters can dance on the head of a novelist's pen?

About half-way through the book, I was speed reading for content. Sure, she had some nice touches - like using objects to stand for feelings and substitute for dialogue, or some odd similes and metaphors, like the narrator saying one couldn't unring a bell. Yet overall the writing devolved into actual bad grammar. By the end of the book all I wanted to know was (spoiler alert) did the baby go to the surrogate mom or the grandparents. And I didn't even care all that much.

This is a hare-and-tortoise book: a strong start doesn't guarantee a good finish. Ptui.

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