

Big Sky Summer

By Linda Lael Miller

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The "First Lady of the West," #1 New York Times *bestselling author Linda Lael Miller, welcomes you home to Parable, Montana—where love awaits.*

With his father's rodeo legacy to continue and a prosperous spread to run, Walker Parrish has no time to dwell on wrecked relationships. But country-western sweetheart Casey Elder is out of the spotlight and back in Parable, Montana. And Walker can't ignore that his "act now, think later" passion for Casey has had consequences. Two *teenage* consequences!

Keeping her children's paternity under wraps has always been part of Casey's plan to give them normal, uncomplicated lives. Now the best way to hold her family together seems to be to let Walker be a part of it—as her husband of convenience. Or will some secrets—like Casey's desire to be the rancher's wife in every way—unravel, with unforeseen results?

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Editorial Review

Review
"Miller's down-home, easy-to-read style keeps the plot moving, and she includes . . . likable characters, picturesque descriptions and some very sweet pets." -Publishers Weekly on Big Sky Country

"Miller's name is synonymous with the finest in western romance." -RT Book Reviews

"Linda Lael Miller creates vibrant characters and stories I defy you to forget."--#1 New York Times bestselling author Debbie Macomber

"A passionate love too long denied drives the action in this multifaceted, emotionally rich reunion story that overflows with breathtaking sexual chemistry." -Library Journal on McKettricks of Texas: Tate

"Miller once again tells a memorable tale." -RT Book Reviews on A Creed in Stone Creek

About the Author

The daughter of a town marshal, Linda Lael Miller is the author of more than 100 historical and contemporary novels. Now living in Spokane, Washington, the “First Lady of the West” hit a career high when all three of her 2011 Creed Cowboy books debuted at #1 on the New York Times list. In 2007, the Romance Writers of America presented her their Lifetime Achievement Award. She personally funds her Linda Lael Miller Scholarships for Women. Visit her at www.lindalaelmiller.com.

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Walker Parrish, wedged into the middle of a third-row pew, with old ladies wearing gauzy hats and floral dresses packed in tightly on either side, risked a glance up at the church ceiling, just to make sure it wasn't fixing to fall on his head. He resisted a nervous urge to loosen his tie—for him, like churchgoing, tie wearing was reserved for funerals and weddings. This occasion, fortunately, fell into the latter category.

The small sanctuary seemed charged with excitement; folks chatted in whispers, the organist was tuning up for the wedding march, and the groom, Sheriff Boone Taylor, stood tall up front, just to the right of the simple altar, looking eager and scared shitless, both at the same time. Like the majority of men around Parable, Montana, Boone lived in jeans, cotton shirts and boots most of the time, and he looked a few degrees past uncomfortable in his rented tux.

Hutch Carmody and Slade Barlow, half brothers and Boone's closest friends, stood up with him, hardly recognizable in monkey suits of their own. Both married men, and cowboys to the core, they kept an eye on Boone, as if ready to catch him by the elbows if his knees buckled, but wry grins twitched at the corners of their mouths, too. They were enjoying this, most likely figuring that if they'd had to get up in front of the whole county and plight their troths, Boone shouldn't be spared the ordeal, either.

Walker fixed his gaze on Hutch, remembering the last time he'd set foot in this tiny church—a June day, much like this one, with birds chirping in the trees and warm breezes sweeping up the aisle from the open

doors of the entryway—and felt the hinges of his jaws lock down. Back then, almost two years ago now, Hutch had been the bridegroom, not best man. And Walker's kid sister, Brylee, the only blood kin he could—or would—rightly claim, had been the bride, shiny-eyed and full of bright hopes, wearing the kind of gown women start dreaming about when they're little girls.

Just when the organ cue sounded, on that other day, the bridesmaids having already taken their places up front, as endlessly rehearsed, and Walker had swung one foot forward to march Brylee between the rows of pews jammed with people, Hutch had suddenly broken rank with Boone and the minister and walked midway down the aisle, where he stopped.

"Hold it," he'd said in a sheepish but nonetheless determined tone.

He'd stopped the wedding, called it off, right then and there, shattering Brylee's fairy-tale dreams and maybe souring her forever on the subject of marriage.

While a part of Walker had been relieved—he'd never thought Brylee and Hutch Carmody were a good fit—the memory of his sister's humiliation still stung like a thistle stuck in his hide. If he hadn't been so busy trying to keep Brylee from doing something stupid, he'd have punched Carmody in the mouth, church or no church.

Which was part of the reason he didn't trust the rafters to hold. He tossed another wary glance toward the ceiling.

The Reverend Walter Beaumont was officiating, and he took his place, book in hand, resplendent in maroon robes and a long gold scarf of some kind. Most times, the preacher dressed Western, like most everybody else, but today he looked as serious as an Old Testament prophet about to lower the boom on a gathering of unrepentant sinners. He looked like Morgan Freeman and sounded like James Earl Jones, so everybody got ready to listen.

Beaumont cleared his throat.

The organist struck the first rousing chord, and the congregation settled in to watch the show. Walker suspected some of them were, like him, wondering if history was about to repeat itself. The thwarted Carmody-Parrish wedding was, around Parable County, anyhow, the stuff of legend.

Tara Kendall's twin stepdaughters, now living with her, were barely teenagers and served as flower girls, happily scattering rose petals in their wake as they fairly danced up the aisle, both of them beaming and obviously enjoying the attention of the guests.

Joslyn Barlow, married to Slade and in a noticeably advanced state of pregnancy, soon followed, wearing an elegant lavender maternity dress and carrying a bouquet of multicolored flowers in both hands.

Walker noted the electric look that passed between Joslyn and her husband as she took her place opposite the three men dressed like tall, rangy penguins.

Kendra Carmody, Hutch's beloved—the woman he'd thrown Brylee over for—came next, sleek and classy in pale yellow and also carrying the requisite flowers.

Hutch winked at her when she came to a stop beside Joslyn, and a fetching blush pinked her cheeks.

Next to join the march were Boone's two young sons, wearing suit jackets and slacks and little bow ties. Each of them carried a satin pillow with a gold wedding band nestled in the hollow, and the smaller boy stopped a couple of times along the way, seeming to forget the procedure. He showed the ring he was carrying to Opal Dennison, and she smiled and gently steered him back on course.

This brought an affectionate twitter from the assembly, and the clicks of several phone cameras slipped in between the notes of organ music.

Walker grinned as the older boy finally backtracked and herded his little brother the rest of the way.

Then it sounded, the loud, triumphant chord signaling the imminent approach of the bride. Walker felt a pang, again reminded of Brylee's ill-fated wedding, but the truth was, he was glad for Boone and glad for Tara Kendall, too.

Widowed several years before, Boone had been one of the walking wounded for a long time, doing his job but clearly unhappy. He was a good sheriff and a fine man, and Walker liked him.

The bride, a glamorous city slicker hailing from the Big Apple, had come to Parable some time before, reportedly to reinvent herself after a nasty divorce. It had been a while before Boone and Tara got together, considering that they'd evidently disliked each other on sight, but they'd finally gotten past all that. And, wisely, Walker thought, they'd agreed on a fairly long courtship, just to make sure.

And now their big day was finally here.

There was a churchwide shuffle as the guests rose, turning to watch the bride start what probably felt like the longest short walk of her life.

Boone's brother-in-law, Bob, escorted Tara, but he was pretty much lost in Tara's glow. She looked like an angel bride in her billowing lacy dress, and her smile was clearly visible behind the rhinestone-studded netting of her veil, as were the happy tears sparkling in her eyes.

Walker felt a catch in his throat, wishing her and Boone well without reservation, but at the same time wanting that kind of joy for his disillusioned kid sister. She'd been invited to this shindig, right along with him, but Brylee stayed away from weddings these days. She stayed away from too many things, in his opinion, working crazy hours, too worn-out to say much when she did turn up, long after all her employees had called it a day and gone home. Even then she immediately retreated to her apartment in the main ranch house, her rescued German shepherd, Snidely, following devotedly at her heels.

Realizing he'd gone woolgathering, which was unlike him, Walker was a little startled when Casey Elder appeared beside the organist, music sheet in hand. She wore a blue choir robe and almost no makeup, and her shoulder-length red hair, usually tumbling around her face in spirals, had been pinned up into a sedate knot at her nape.

Inwardly, Walker allowed himself a grim, silent chortle.

This was a side of Casey he'd rarely if ever seen, despite the tangled and chaotic history they shared. She could still pack arenas and major concert halls, even after fifteen years as a professional entertainer, and she'd never recorded a song that hadn't gone straight to number one on all the charts and ridden there for weeks on end. Her videos were legendary, full of fire and smoke and color, and she was as famous for her

flashy style as she was for her voice, always astounding in its power and range. A thing that spread its wings and took flight, soaring like a soul set free.

Onstage or on camera, she wore custom-made outfits so bejeweled that she glittered like a dark Montana sky full of stars, a one-woman constellation, and between her looks and the way she sang, she took every member of every audience captive and held them spellbound until the moment she retreated into the wings after the last curtain call. Even then, the magic lingered.

Walker wondered if Casey's legions of fans would even recognize her the way she looked today, all prim and well scrubbed. He shook off the riot of reactions he felt whenever he encountered this woman, up close or at a distance, and kept his face impassive when she started to sing.

She'd written the song, all about promises and sunrises and sticking together no matter what, especially for Boone and Tara. The organ played softly in the background, a gossamer thread of sound supporting that amazing voice.

By the time she finished, the old ladies on either side of Walker were sniffling happily into their lace-trimmed hankies, and Walker felt the need to blink a couple of times himself.

Casey retreated as swiftly and silently as a ghost, and the ceremony began.

The truth was, most of it was lost on Walker. He sat there in a daze, Casey's song reverberating inside him like a sweet echo.

Boone moved to stand tall and proud beside his bride, and the reverend began his speech.

Vows were exchanged, promises made, and the light of Boone's and Tara's separate candles bonded into a single flame, strong and steady, barely flickering. They slipped rings onto each other's fingers, their faces shining.

Walker, a man in a daze, took it all in, like a dream, with Casey's remarkable voice for a sound track.

The reverend pronounced them man and wife in a tone of rumbling jubilance, and Boone gently raised Tara's veil, smoothed it back and kissed her with a tenderness that struck even Walker's tough cowboy heart like the plucking of a fiddle string.

The organ erupted again, joyous thunder, startling Walker out of the spell Casey had cast over him, and Mr. and Mrs. Boone Taylor came down the aisle together, both of them beaming, cheers breaking out all around them.

Patiently, Walker waited for the guests to file out into the afternoon sunshine, scented with flowers and new-mown grass and fresh asphalt, glad the wedding was over and equally glad he'd put on scratchy duds and shown up.

Now all he had to do was put in an appearance at the reception, eat a little cake, shake Boone's hand and kiss Tara's cheek, nod to this person and that one, and make a subtle escape. The to-do, which would probably resemble a small circus, was to be held in Casey's massive backyard, about the last place Walker wanted to hang out, but there was no avoiding it, since he was representing Brylee as well as himself. If he was lucky, he might manage to steal a moment or two with Clare and Shane while steering clear of their mother.

Clare and Shane. Casey's children.

His children.

Finally reaching his truck, a big rig with an extended cab and plenty of horsepower for hauling trailers loaded with rodeo stock, Walker swung up into the driver's seat and immediately dispensed with his tie, which was starting to feel like a noose.

The road in front of the church was plenty crowded, and it took a while to get into the flow of traffic, all headed toward Casey's mansion on Rodeo Road.

Walker spotted the nuptial limo up ahead and smiled in spite of his increasing case of the jitters, because Boone's and Tara's heads and shoulders were sticking up through the open sunroof, and both of them glowed as if they'd had sunshine for breakfast. It was good to be reminded that that kind of happiness was possible, short of heaven itself. With one broken marriage behind him, besides his long and tempestuous relationship with Casey, Walker tended toward skepticism when it came to love and romance. The kind that lasted, anyhow.

A mild glumness overtook him as he drove at a parade pace, and he was tempted, more than once, to zip out of the procession onto a side street, head home to his horses and his bulls and his regular clothes, and skip the whole second act. If only he hadn't been cursed with a single-minded—some would say cussed—nature, the kind that compelled a man to do what he thought was right, whether that happened to be his personal inclination at the time or not.

So he endured, pushing on until the line of cars and trucks finally snaked onto Rodeo Road, and Casey's house loomed ahead, big as a mountain. He found a parking spot—no small feat in itself—and walked two blocks to the mouth of the long white-gravel driveway, blending in with the wedding guests and the throng of new arrivals who wouldn't have fit inside the church.

Everybody was dressed up in their best, toting wrapped presents and covered casseroles and flowers cut from their gardens.

Walker felt a little self-conscious, showing up empty-handed, but that passed quickly. Brylee had taken care of the gift-giving end of things, signing his name and her own to the card, and whatever she'd sent was sure to be just right for the occasion.

Rounding the side of the house with the others, Walker was amused to see that he'd guessed right— Casey's yard did indeed have a carnival-like atmosphere, with paper lanterns strung on every branch of every tree, a silver fountain flowing with chocolate instead of water, a massive canvas canopy arching above a couple of dozen tables. There was a bandstand, too, a temporary dance floor, an open bar and, incredibly, a genuine carousel for the little ones.

Obviously, this party would go on long after Boone and Tara had cut the cake, posed for the pictures, danced the customary waltz and lit out on their weeklong honeymoon. Rumors varied as to the destination—Vegas, Honolulu and Cabo were all in the running—but the bride and groom were keeping that information to themselves.

In a town where almost everybody knew everybody else's business, folks kept what secrets they could. Walker was taking in the Casey-like spectacle of the whole setup when Shane turned up, handsome in his

slacks and white dress shirt, though he'd gotten rid of his tie and suit jacket at some point. At thirteen, the boy was growing up fast—every time Walker saw him, he was a little taller, or his feet were a size bigger, or both.

"Hey, Walker," Shane greeted him, grinning. While his sister resembled Casey, with her auburn hair, milky complexion and green eyes, Shane looked pretty much the way Walker had at his age. Strange that nobody seemed to notice that and put two and two together.

"Hey," Walker replied. "Looks like this is going to be quite a party."

Shane nodded. "Mom's going to sing later," he said, "and the whole town could live for a year on the food the caterers are setting out."

Walker's throat tightened. He was tough, raised a ranch kid, no stranger to hard work *or* hard knocks, but hearing Casey sing at the wedding had nearly dropped him to his knees, figuratively, anyhow. Listening to her repertoire of greatest hits might just kill him.

"I can't stick around too long," he said, his voice coming out gruff. "I've got things to do out at the ranch—" He fell silent then, because of the way Shane's face fell. Although the kid probably had no clue that Walker was his biological father—Casey had made sure of that—there had always been a bond between him and Shane just the same. Walker was the avuncular family friend, the guy who usually turned up for Thanksgiving dinners, birthdays and sometimes Christmas. Casey refused to accept child support, but Walker had been putting away money for his son and daughter for years just the same.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Phyllis Baudoin:

Big Sky Summer can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to set every word into joy arrangement in writing Big Sky Summer however doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource details that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information could drawn you into new stage of crucial thinking.

Mavis Strain:

This Big Sky Summer is great reserve for you because the content that is certainly full of information for you who else always deal with world and also have to make decision every minute. This book reveal it details accurately using great coordinate word or we can say no rambling sentences inside. So if you are read the item hurriedly you can have whole information in it. Doesn't mean it only offers you straight forward sentences but hard core information with splendid delivering sentences. Having Big Sky Summer in your hand like keeping the world in your arm, info in it is not ridiculous one. We can say that no publication that offer you world in ten or fifteen tiny right but this guide already do that. So , this is good reading book. Hi Mr. and Mrs. active do you still doubt in which?

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