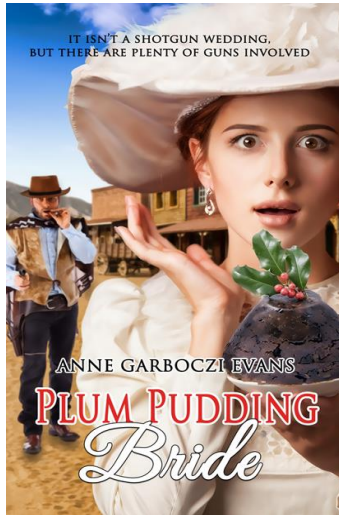


Discussion Questions



PLUM PUDDING BRIDE

Christmas Extravaganza 2015

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About the Book

Patience Callahan is twenty-five and fast becoming an old maid. But she's spent most of her life dreaming over romantic European literature and wants a dashing d'Artagnan, not a bookish Bob Cratchit. Alas, the Colorado town of Gilman's chock-full of Cratchit's without a d'Artagnan in sight.

Peter Foote, the general store owner, has been in love with Patience for seven years. But every time he's on the verge of proposing, she cuts him off; he can only imagine on purpose. This time though, dadburn it, he's going to go through with it.

Ring in hand, he's moments from touching knee to floor, when Patience pulls out a list of mail-order bride advertisements and declares her intention to marry a backwoods stranger, on Christmas Day.

Peter has two weeks to change her mind.

TITLE: Plum Pudding Bride

Discussion:

Question 1: Several Gilman women congratulate Kitty on being wooed by the general store owner. What were the advantages of marrying a shopkeeper rather than a farmer or rancher?

Answer 1: As much as we romanticize 19th century farming and ranching, they were both hard and lonely professions. Farmer and rancher's wives aged fast under the intense sun and back-breaking work. The winter snows would also isolate them for months at a time. A general store owner's wife would have the advantage of living in town, close to churches and schools, as well as having easy access to the latest merchandise shipped in from the East.

Question 2: Arnie Dehaven questions why Patience, a woman from a stable home situation, would answer a mail-order bride advertisement. Was becoming a mail-order bride a last resort for 19th century women? Why?

Answer 2: If modern women mistrust a man's profile information on e-harmony, only imagine how unreliable information mail-order brides had about their grooms. Both laws and customs of the time made a woman, and her children, completely dependent on the man she married. And, unlike today, a man could cheat on, beat, or abuse his wife with no resulting divorce. Marrying a stranger was taking a huge risk.

Question 3: Arnie Dehaven is nothing like Patience expected. Do you think many of the Old West's mail-order brides ended up in bad marriages?

Answer 3: Romance literature is full of mail-order brides. While most of the mail-order marriages lasted a lifetime, that doesn't mean they were all happy. According to the advertisements of the day, many of the men and women weren't even looking for a love-match. Financial stability and children were the goal.

Question 4: Is Kitty correct that Peter is blinded by love, or is Patience really as amazing as he thinks?

Answer 4: Patience seems like a sweet girl, but any man who would describe the scuff marks on a girl's shoes as adorable is probably a little lovesick.

Question 5: At twenty-five, Patience is fast becoming an "old maid." Practically speaking, what were the disadvantages of never marrying in the 1890s American West?

Answer 5: While single women did work in the Old West, they usually did not make as much money as a man. Many tasks, plowing, roping cattle, took the strength of a man. In general though, single Western women had more freedoms and opportunities to support themselves than their Eastern counterparts.

Question 6: If Arnie hadn't come to Gilman and Patience had taken the train to him in Wyoming, do you think she would have married him the same day? How would that have worked out for her?

Answer 6: Mail-order marriages happened fast. While a significant percentage of women ran the other direction after meeting the man who bought their train ticket, many more married their groom the next day, or the next week. And once married, that was that. Though many 19th century women did band together to start temperance leagues because they thought banning liquor would reduce the number of men who beat their wives.

Question 7: Patience had been friends with Peter for many years. What are some advantages of marrying someone you know well?

Answer 7: In the 19th century, older women repeated the saying "marry in haste, repent at leisure." Statistically, even today swift marriages result in higher divorce rates.

Question 8: Kitty mentions clothes and fashion from the East. How did the Callahan's standard of living differ from what they would have had if they lived in the East?

Answer 8: Tour a traditional 1890s Eastern house, and then look at the possessions that would have fit in a family's covered wagon and you will see the tremendous difference moving West made. While the wealthy in the East were starting to have things like electricity and running water, some Western women were still building soddy houses.

Question 9: Patience loves to read. Where would she have obtained the books she read?

Answer 9 Most Western homes would have a family Bible. But, unlike in the East, there weren't many libraries. Dime novels made popular fiction accessible to working class people. Technical advances allowed the price of books to fall throughout the 19th century, but it would still have been expensive to collect a personal library of the size that Patience desired.

Question 10: Do you think that Peter and Patience lived happily ever after? What do you think the biggest marital fight they ever had was about?

Answer 10: I think so. Though I imagine Patience burnt quite a few batches of cornbread reading books she ordered from the general store catalog. Perhaps a few years down the road as the silver-mine business grew, Peter had an opportunity to expand his business and they fought over how big of a financial risk to take. I imagine Patience would advocate for more risky business ventures than Peter.

