



*Taming
Julia*

JODIE WOLFE

A GUN-TOTING, BREECHES-WEARING WIFE
WASN'T WHAT THE MINISTER ORDERED



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Jodie Wolfe

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Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

White Rose Publishing, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC
www.pelicanbookgroup.com PO Box 1738 *Aztec, NM * 87410

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Publishing History

First White Rose Edition, 2020

Hardback Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0272-8

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0271-1

Published in the United States of America

Dedication

My first praise goes to my Lord and Savior who instilled in me a desire to share stories.

To my dear, sweet husband who encourages me daily to fulfill this calling. Thanks for being my biggest cheerleader.

To my friend, Joy. Thank you for all your helpful edits and insights.

To my fellow Scribes. Thank you for your help during the early stages of this project.

To Uncle Robert and Aunt Nickie. Thanks for helping with my Texas research.

To Nicola and Jamie. Thank you for your help in bringing this story to completion.

Finally, for my mom, for always believing I had a gift and pushing me toward using it.

What People are Saying

Taming Julia is the charming tale of an unconventional heroine who longs for a home and family and the reluctant hero who fears he's made a dreadful mistake by marrying her. Jodie Wolfe has skillfully penned a fascinating debut novel with colorful characters and an interesting plot that celebrates friendship, family, and faith.

~ Vickie McDonough, award-winning author of 27 books, including *Whispers on the Prairie*, a Romantic Times recommended inspirational read July, 2013.

*Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end
of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is
overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*
Psalm 61:1-2(KJV)

1

Matrimony News, February 6, 1875 edition

*Minister bachelor aged 27, height 5 feet 10 inches seeks
genteel, honest and first-rate homemaker with a desire to
serve God. Must be willing to marry by proxy and arrive in
Burrton Springs, Kansas by May 1.*

~*~

Burrton Springs, Kansas, Saturday, May 1, 1875

*Dear Lord, please don't let that creature be my new
wife.* Drew Montgomery swiped the sweat trickling a
path down his neck and shoved the new hat back on
his head. He squinted, taking in the lone passenger
stepping from the stagecoach. At least, he thought it
was a woman. He shielded his eyes from the sun,
taking in the britches.

Britches? A gun belt strapped to a slim waist. He
gulped. A rifle rested on her shoulder, and she wore a
Stetson situated low on her brow. The figure shifted

sideways, and Drew groaned, fearing his proxy mail-order bride had arrived by the look of all the curves. He squared his shoulders and crossed the street.

"Are you Montgomery?" Her coffee-brown gaze seared through him.

He snapped his gaping mouth shut and nodded. "Y-yes."

"Name's Jules Walker." She shoved her hand into his and shook it so hard his teeth clattered. "I reckon, Jules Montgomery since we're hitched." She waved a slip of paper in his face. "Got the paper here to prove it. So are you my husband or not?"

Drew caught a whiff of dirt. He coughed and cleared his throat.

She peered at him as if he were a chicken with one leg.

"I'm Drew." He managed to choke the words out. "Isn't your name Julia?"

She scrunched her face, pushed her Stetson from her head, and allowed it to dangle from the string around her neck. Her brown hair scattered in disarray, slipping from a shoulder-length braid. "I can't remember the last time I've been called Julia. Like I said, name's Jules."

"But..." Drew let the word hang between them. No matter. "Where're your things?"

"Got my knapsack and that there." She pointed to the top of the stagecoach. He expected to see a trunk, but a saddle rested there instead. What kind of woman brought a saddle into a marriage? What kind of woman showed up dressed like a man? *No. No.* Something was terribly wrong.

"I reckon you'll need to sign this here paper to make it all proper like. I already signed my name, and

there's the judge's signature." She poked at the words on the page.

"Yes, I'll inscribe it when we reach our home." Drew shouldered the knapsack, hefted the saddle, and headed in the direction of the parsonage.

"Home. I like the sound of that." Jules smiled, a dimple flickered in each cheek, giving him the first hint that she was truly a female. She studied him for a moment then slanted her gaze to their surroundings.

"This is a town, huh? A heap of buildings tossed in one place." She gawked at each structure they passed.

Nothing seemed to escape her notice. The sun beat down with no mercy as they meandered along the street. He wished she'd hurry before anyone spotted her. What type of character had he agreed to marry? She didn't appear at all like the woman for whom he'd advertised, but now there was no way to change things. He forced his choppy breathing to slow. No avoiding it. He needed a wife by the next day, and his lone alternative, the one he'd chosen in order to keep his job, hiked along behind him. Drew cast a glance over his shoulder, moaned, and came to a halt. His bride plowed into him, causing him to stumble and fall to his knees.

"Sorry." She dusted him off with her hat and offered a hand. "What'd you stop for?"

"Did you bring a horse?" He brushed at the dirt on his pants and picked up the saddle. His gaze drifted toward the stagecoach.

"Nah, Josh made me sell him afore I came here. Almost the worst thing I ever done." She knocked the dirt from her hat before returning it to her head. "Here. There's no reason to tote everything by yerself. Let me help."

"No." He shifted her belongings to a more comfortable position. "I've got it."

"Don't have to get testy."

"I'm *not* testy." A sigh hissed from his lips. *Give me patience, Lord.* He'd met his wife all of two minutes ago, and they already were having difficulty communicating. Had he been too hasty? *I must not have been thinking straight to order a woman sight unseen.* He shook his head. "A gentleman helps a lady."

She snickered, and then her eyes narrowed. "Not goin' back on yer word, are you?"

He gulped. Surely she couldn't read his mind?

"I guess it won't be bindin' until you sign this." She waved the document.

Drew pulled a shallow breath into his lungs, thankful she hadn't pursued her question. "As I...I said, I'll pen my name when we get to my place." He took advantage of his long strides, and hurried along the street, grateful nobody milled around.

"What's yer hurry?" Jules jogged to keep up with him.

Drew slowed his pace. "I assumed you'd be anxious to rest after the long trip. Where exactly in Texas did you reside? I don't remember any mention of it."

Her eyebrow lifted. "Seein' as we just met, I don't suspect I told you, but I last came from the Blanco area."

"I've never been to Texas." His arms perspired beneath the load of gear.

Jules moved the rifle to her opposite shoulder while marching along like a toy soldier. "Is yer place in town?"

"On the outskirts." Drew nodded in the direction

of his home, which was nestled beside the building that served as the schoolhouse during the week and church on Sundays. Beyond it stretched a fallow field that met the horizon. He didn't want her to explore. He wanted to get to his house, hustle her inside, and close the door against any busybodies.

Jules scrutinized the homes and businesses, stopping every few steps to stare at them. "Guess it will take some gettin' used to."

"What will?" He tried to peer into her eyes, but she had shielded them with her hat.

"Livin' in a town."

"It's not much of a town yet, but perhaps we'll compare to Hutchinson before too long. Here we are." Drew swung the door open and moved aside, allowing her to enter the kitchen. "It's kind of small, but I hope you'll like it."

~*~

Jules scanned the room. Blue wildflowers sat in the center of a table, their scent wafting. "What's the big thing there?"

"A cook stove." His hazel eyes surveyed her.

How should she know what it was? She snapped her mouth shut. Better to not ask too much afore he signed the paper. Her brother had told her the marriage wouldn't be official-like until then. Josh hadn't said why she needed to come here and take a husband, but she trusted him. She sensed his decision had something to do with her safety. He'd told her returning to Texas wasn't possible.

Her new husband set the saddle near the door and

motioned her toward the rest of the house. "Here's the sitting room."

Jules 'sposed it had the name because the thing in the center of the room was something a person sat on. Probably more comfortable than anything she'd ever been on along the trail. There were frilly things on the arms of the chair. She knew better than to ask.

Next they breezed by a small room. "That's my study."

"I ain't sure what a study is. Can't say I've ever seen one." She craned her neck as they passed the room.

Drew stopped short.

"Whoa there." She stumbled into him. "Wasn't expectin' you to hold up so fast."

His face got as red as a berry. He moved aside and allowed her to enter the last room.

She managed to contain a squeal when she saw the bed. Jules couldn't remember the last time she'd slept in one. Another large piece of furniture stood along the opposite wall. She walked over and ran her fingers along the smooth top. "It's right cold. What do you call it?"

"A marble-top dresser," he replied. "It arrived last week. I thought you might want to have something special for dresses and..."

Warmth climbed into her face and neck while a swarm of bees took up residence in her gut.

The man's face darkened again.

She hoped he didn't have something wrong with him to make his face change like that each time they talked. "Feeling all right?"

"Yes." He gulped, taking on the likeness of a cornered critter. "Why?"

Jules wrangled how to answer. She stepped forward and removed his hat. The golden hair at his temples held a crease. For a few seconds, she fanned at his face to cool him off. A whiff of manly scent teased her senses.

He blinked rapidly and licked his lips. He captured her hand in his warm grip. "How about I endorse our marriage certificate?" Drew yanked her toward the kitchen. He shoved her into a chair and ran to the small room he'd called his study. He tripped and almost dropped the pen and jar of ink as he entered.

"I guess yer in a mighty big hurry to get hitched." Jules smiled, not sure why his face immediately repeated that cornered likeness. Her stomach did a funny flop, while her heart thudded in her ears.

He uncapped the jar and dipped the pen. With quick scratching, he made his mark on the paper and blew on it. "There, it's legitimate and right on time."

What did he mean? Jules puffed out a breath and stood up. It'd take a heap of patience to make sense of the man. Knocking her hat off, she let it dangle between her shoulders. A lump twisted in her throat. Her thoughts hadn't gone beyond arriving and meeting her new husband. Straining to recall memories of how her parents had acted, she came up with nothing. What 'xactly did a married couple do together? Warmth flooded her cheeks when she remembered the lone thing her brother had advised her concernin' the situation. "Josh said couples kiss after they're hitched. Should we try it? I've never done it afore, but I reckon we could give it a shot." She puckered her lips and waited.

Drew took a big step backward.

Had she used the wrong word? Jules wrinkled her

brow, trying to recollect what her brother had said. Had he called it a peck? *Nah, couldn't be.* That's what prairie chickens did when they found a tasty bug.

Her new husband sputtered.

She whacked him hard on the back. The poor man must still have something caught in his throat. "Got any willow bark?"

He shook his head.

"You keep havin' those coughing fits. Guess I need to get you healthy. You seem a might unfit."

"Unfit?" His eyes darted side-to-side.

"Easy there." She patted his arm. "I'm not gonna to hurt you."

~*~

Tempted to yank his arm away, Drew withstood her soothing. Unfit, indeed! Should we kiss? *Really, Lord? What kind of brazen woman is she?* Jules had sounded so sweet in her letters, but obviously there'd been some sort of miscommunication. How could he bring it up when he'd just made their marriage legal? His thoughts skipped to what would become their first night together. He'd been so busy trying to plan a way around the elders' stipulation to marry, he hadn't considered it. A bead of sweat pooled on his forehead. Would people talk if he started sleeping in the barn? His chest constricted.

"You sick or somethin'? Got all pale around the cheek bones." She motioned to his face. "Seen a doc lately?"

He tried to answer, but his lunch took up sudden residence in his throat. "Excuse me." Drew didn't wait

for her reply. He clamped a hand over his mouth and dashed for the door, running toward the outhouse.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he entered the house a few minutes later and couldn't find Jules. Maybe he'd experienced a nightmare. Or he needed to accept his fate and make the best of it. *Give me strength for what's ahead, Lord.* His hand shook as he drank a glass of water. Setting it down, Drew went in search of his new bride. He found her kneeling just beyond the schoolhouse, beside a small campfire with a pot of water hanging above it.

Jules glanced his way.

Drew scraped his knuckles across his forehead.

She frowned, studying him. "Is yer head hurting too? Land's sake. Guess I got here just in time."

The woman has no idea. His bride stood and grazed her fingertips across his brow.

"Hope you're not coming down with something. Sure didn't expect to spend my first day with my husband losing his food everywhere." She placed her hands on her hips. "It's a good thing Josh didn't know you were sick, or he would've never agreed to us marrying up."

It took sheer will power to keep his stomach under control and his feet from rushing for the little building behind the house a second time. His thoughts fuzzed and blurred. Jules had been spouting words about being sick and something concerning some man. *Josh?* She hadn't mentioned a last name, had she? A former beau? He racked his brain, trying to remember what she'd said in her letters. Nothing came to mind.

"Here, sit down." Jules pushed him on the grass and tried to press his head between his knees. She quirked an eyebrow. "Feeling puny, still? The tea will

be ready in a bit. Rest a spell, and I'll fix you up right quick." She bent and stirred the pot with a stick.

He peered at her, motioning toward the house. "You could have prepared this inside."

"It's so much nicer out here." She shaded her eyes from the setting sun. "Besides, it don't take me long, and once you drink my willow bark tea, it'll help your gut." Her gaze darted about as if checking the perimeter.

If he'd known her better, he'd guess her nerves were drawn tight. His face warmed, and he ran his tongue across his lips. "Did you say willow bark?"

She examined him momentarily. "Yes, it's good for what ails a body. Josh and me use it all the time along the trail when one of us is feeling poorly. Glad I had some in my bag, or it would've taken me a heap longer to fix it. 'Course it'd taste better if I had some whiskey and honey. Don't s'pose you have any? Any willow trees around here? Sure is awful flat and not many trees. How do you stand it? Texas don't have a lot of trees neither, depends which part you're travelin' through. I guess each place has a beauty all its own. Sure do miss trees, though. The wind always blow like this? Might take some gettin' used to." She took a breath, "Don't say a whole lot, do you? Josh gets tired of me talking too. 'Course it's always worse when I'm nervous. Not that I'm nervous. Have you lived here long?"

Drew wasn't sure which question to answer first.

"Tea's almost ready. I'll fetch a mug from my pack. Hold on."

He opened his mouth to respond, but she'd taken off at a run, her lithe form covering the distance and returning in record time.

“Here we go.” She used the edge of her jacket to grab the pan, poured the contents into a tin cup, and handed it to him. “Should I keep the fire going so I can cook us up some grub in a bit?”

A waft of the bitter brew accosted his nose. “No. Yes. I mean, our dinner’s in the warming pan. I imagined you’d be weary from the trip, and I didn’t want cooking a meal to be a concern on your first night here.”

“That’s right thoughtful, Drew. I ’preciate it. Josh would’ve never done something so proper. His gut always came first.”

Drew formed the words to inquire concerning the elusive Josh. She startled him by bussing his cheeks with her lips. He refrained from placing his fingers where her lips had been.

Jules extinguished the flames and helped him to his feet. She was strong in spite of her petite frame.

“Say, you haven’t drunk any tea yet.”

Drew blew on the hot liquid then took a sip. He grimaced and shivered involuntarily.

“I reckon it don’t taste the best, but sure does the body good. Makes one feel perky in no time. Let’s go find some grub. I’m starving.”

He allowed himself to be led to the house.

Jules kept after him until he drank the tea. He fought not to make a face as he handed the cup to her. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Better?” Her intense stare made him want to squirm.

He lowered his eyes, surprised to discover his stomach *had* improved. “Yes, I appreciate it, Jules. I believe I feel up to eating some supper after all.”

A smile crossed her tanned face. “Knew it would

help. Glad I could lend a hand right away. You won't be sorry for marryin' me."

Her chattering followed him as he crossed to the cook stove, gathered their meal, and placed it on the small table. "There're cloth napkins and flatware in the drawer," he said motioning to one. He pulled out glasses and poured water into them.

"Aren't these fine." Jules ran her fingers across the fabric. "I've never seen nothing like it afore. What're they called, and what're they for?"

"Napkins. For wiping a mouth during the meal." His heart pounded.

"Whoever thought to have a slip of material to swab yer mouth when food slopped on it? I thought that's what sleeves were for." She inhaled deeply. "Sure smells good in here. I'm hungrier than a hog at feeding time."

What sort of ruffian had he married? Drew held her chair, waiting for her to sit then found his own seat.

"What a gentleman."

A lump formed in his throat as he grasped her hand.

Jules blushed and interlaced her fingers with his.

He bowed his head and prayed, stumbling over the words. Her hand seared a permanent brand in his. The steady ticking of the clock brought him to the present.

"Did'ya want to hold hands all through the meal?"

"Amen." He hastily snatched his hand free and dug into the food. "No, just when we pray."

They ate in mutual silence, but Drew's mind was far from quiet.

Jules snagged his plate. "I'll wash these up right

quick. We can do some kissing tomorrow." She yawned. "I'm plain tuckered out and need some sleep."