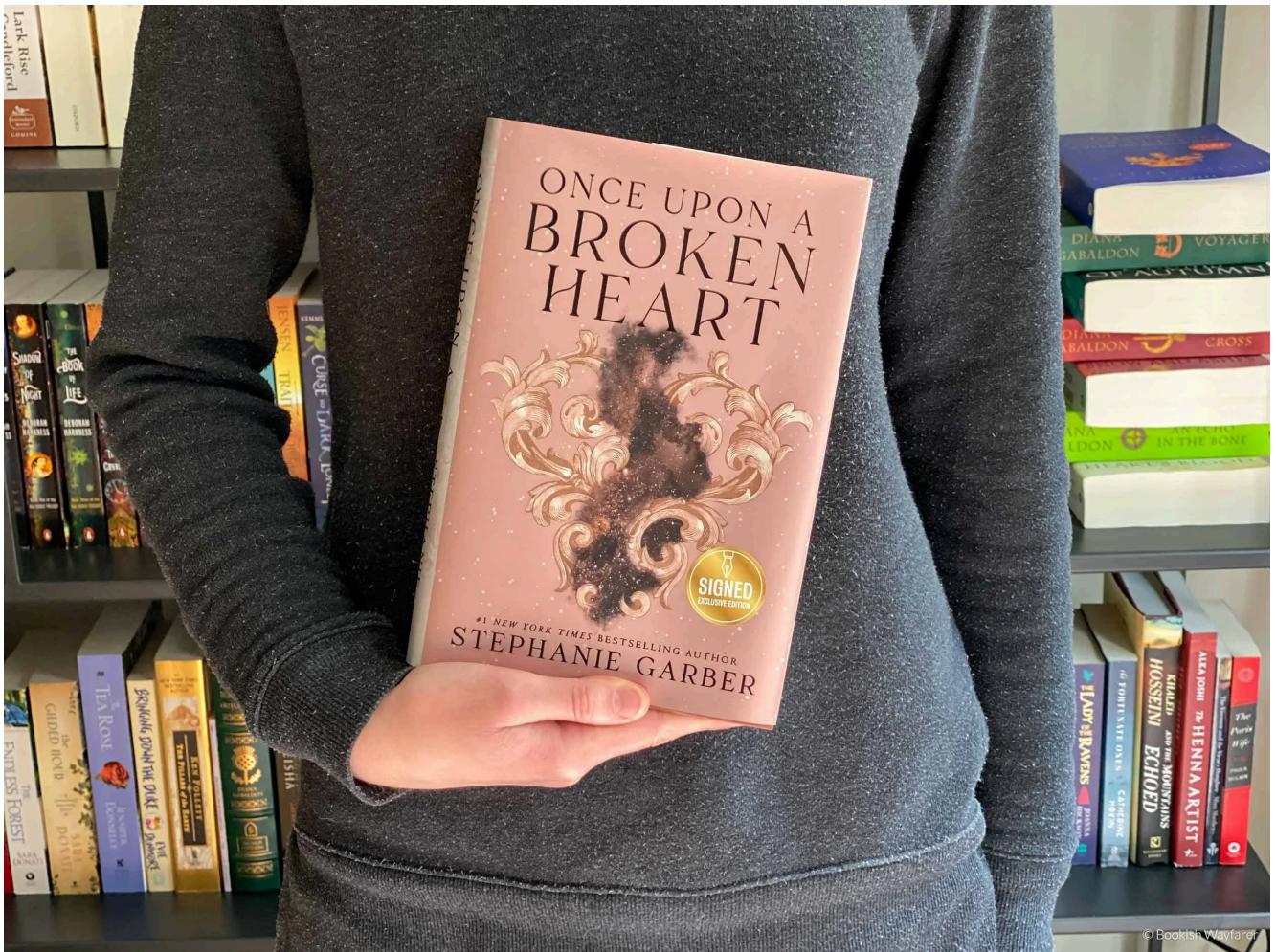


May 27 - Written By Julia Martin

Review: Once upon a Broken Heart by Stephanie Garber



"But hope is a difficult thing to kill, just a spark of it can start a fire..."

— Stephanie Garber, Once upon a Broken Heart

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The Basics

Title: Once upon a Broken Heart ([Once upon a Broken Heart #1](#))

Author: [Stephanie Garber](#)

Published: 2021

Publisher: Flatiron Books — Macmillan

Pages: 403

Format: Hardcover

Genres: Fiction — Fantasy, High fantasy, Romance, Fantasy romance, Young adult, Young adult fantasy

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Book Synopsis

When the man Evangeline loves becomes engaged to her stepsister, she becomes convinced that he has been bewitched. Desperate to stop the marriage, she makes a deal with the Prince of Hearts: in exchange for three kisses, he will stop the wedding. It is a seemingly small price to pay for her future happiness, but as with any deal made with a Fate, it ends up entailing more than meets the eye. Soon, her very heart is on the line.



TLDR: A dazzling fantasy replete with intriguing characters, romance, and a captivating plot.

Stephanie Garber has done it again – she has written yet another fantastic book. *Once upon a Broken Heart* is truly unputdownable. As soon as I began reading it, I was completely engrossed, and I ended up binge reading all 403 pages in a little over a day. Already, I am fighting the urge to pick it back up and reread it, as I so enjoyed it.

With its magical and transportive qualities, the story hooks you from the get-go. It ferries you away to a fairytale-like world filled with intrigue, danger, and otherworldly beings. Magic is as pervasive as deception and ulterior motives, the consequence of which being that you can never be entirely sure of who to trust or what will happen next. If you are anything like me, you will find yourself periodically exclaiming, or at the very least mouthing, “What?!” while reading this book.

Complementing this captivating plot is a cast of complex and interesting characters, including Jacks, the enigmatic Prince of Hearts. He is one of the most compelling characters I have come across in recent history. At times villainous and other times quasi-heroic, his underlying motives are never wholly apparent. You want to give him the benefit of the doubt and trust him, but to do so seems unwise. Nonetheless, his tragic backstory of unrequited love and curse of killing all of the women that he kisses, save his one true love, garner him sympathy and make him seem almost (but not quite) human. His swoon-worthy appearance and confident, teasing demeanor certainly don’t hurt either.

Then, there is Evangeline, the story’s protagonist. Although different from Jacks in many regards, she is also quite similar to him. She is flawed, and much like Jacks, she is prone to letting her desires influence her decisions. Both, for instance, have made some questionable choices as a result of a broken heart. Unlike Jacks, however, it is clear that at her core, she is a good person. The jury is still out on Jacks’ true nature.

These intermingling threads of similarity and discordance create a fascinating dynamic between Jacks and Evangeline. They are both drawn to one another, yet they both seem intent on fighting that attraction. Readers of the *Caraval* trilogy will know the source of Jacks’ reluctance; Evangeline’s hesitation seems rooted in Jacks’ misdeeds and less-than-stellar reputation. Caring for Jacks would mean accepting him, including all of the terrible things that he has done and will likely continue to do, and it would also mean entrusting her already broken heart to a man not known for his kindness. This tug-of-war between wanting and not wanting one another gives rise to an electrifying chemistry between the two of them. You can feel the magnetic pull that they have on one another, and when they give in to that pull, sparks fly (like in the mausoleum scene – if you know, you know 😊).



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entirely clear; she flits between seeming untrustworthy and sorely misjudged. She adds conflict and suspense to the story, which ultimately, adds to the book's enjoyability.

Also contributing to the book's appeal is its world building. *Once upon a Broken Heart* explores a part of the *Caraval* universe that was hitherto only mentioned in passing: the North. Shrouded in lore and steeped in magic and curses, the North makes for a mesmerizing backdrop and enhances the fairytale-like feel of the story. Wandering through its whimsical streets and harrowing underground is a vicarious adventure. Danger, excitement, and suspense: we get to experience them all from the safety of our sofas.

What brings all of these elements together and truly makes the story shine is Garber's writing. She is a born storyteller and writes in an engaging, easy-to-understand manner. She has paced the story perfectly, ensuring that the reader's interest never wanes. Moreover, her use of a single point of view (Evangeline's) further tightens her hold on the reader's attention by heightening the story's suspense and sense of mystery. Garber has also managed to write *Once upon a Broken Heart* in such a manner that you can enjoy it without having read the *Caraval* trilogy, which is no easy feat. That said, I would recommend reading the *Caraval* series prior to reading *Once upon a Broken Heart* if you plan on eventually reading the *Caraval* books, as *Once upon a Broken Heart* does contain some spoilers for *Finale*, the final book in the *Caraval* trilogy.

The not so good

Evangeline has a tendency to be too trusting of others, which can be frustrating at times. I occasionally found myself wishing that I could jump into the story and warn her. The other not-so-good aspect of this book is that it ends on a cliffhanger, and the sequel is not yet published. So, it will be a bit of a wait before we know how things pan out for Evangeline.

Overall

Once upon a Broken Heart is a spellbinding fantasy and a brilliant start to the eponymous series. I am already chomping at the bit for the sequel. If you enjoyed *Caraval*, you will love *Once upon a Broken Heart*.

Have you read *Once upon a Broken Heart*? If so, let me know what you thought of it in the comments section below!

