



Simply from Scratch

Alicia Bessette

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Alicia Bessette writes with compassion and tenderness to illuminate the many unexpected ways people save each others' lives every day-often without even knowing it. Poignant, bittersweet, and strikingly honest, *Simply from Scratch* is a radiant celebration of friendship and the strength of the human spirit.

Rose-Ellen ("Zell") Carmichael Roy wears her late husband Nick's camouflage apron even when she's not in the kitchen. That's her widow style.

It's been over a year since Nick died tragically during a post-Katrina relief mission in New Orleans. Long enough, according to the grief pamphlets, to have begun to move on with her life. But Zell is still unable to enter her attic, which is full of Nick memories. She hasn't even turned on her oven because cooking was Nick's chore. That is, until she decides to enter the first annual *Desserts that Warm the Soul* baking contest, hoping to donate the grand prize to Katrina survivors in Nick's memory.

Meanwhile, Zell's nine-year-old neighbor, Ingrid Knox, is learning to cope with the loneliness of growing up without a mother. With an imagination as big as her heart, Ingrid treasures her doting father but begins to plot how she will meet the woman who abandoned her so many years ago. When an embarrassing baking mishap brings Zell and Ingrid together, they form an unlikely friendship that will alter both of their lives forever. Together, and with the help of a lively and loveable cast of friends and family, Zell and Ingrid embark on winning the *Desserts that Warm the Soul* contest - and learn that through the many sorrows and joys of life, with a little bit of flour and a pinch of love, anything is possible.

Watch a Video

Simply from Scratch Details

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Author : Alicia Bessette

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From Reader Review Simply from Scratch for online ebook

Doreen says

A grieving widow, a deserted daughter, a single dad, a guilt ridden best friend, a New England town of close knit, hard working, very real people, a TV cooking personality, an old lady no nonsense chainsaw artist and a greyhound who communicates in pirate talk...I just loved this book. It is a book about relationships between characters that I wanted to call freinds. Characters that I found myself cheering for as they cared for, tended to and helped each other cope with the realities of life which wound us all. Characters that deserved to be in a book read by many because of their noble example

This is a book of compassion, encouragement and hope. It made me laugh out loud, sit up straight (what?) and cry as it touched my heart. All that with a recipe (which I tried true by the way) and a lovable greyhound named Capt Ahab....who fills the void...as do all "smartly hounds...arrr!"

Suzanne says

I'm exhausted and spent in a good way. This is the best book I have read in a long, long time and my first 5-star read this year. Though it sounds cliched, I can't think of a better way to say that I laughed out loud, I cried big weeping sobs at times, and laughed and cried simultaneously several times. This novel reached the darkest corners of my heart and warmed them in an almost 'divine union' kind of way. The story was so bittersweet, redemptive, heart-warming, adorable, lovable in every way without ever being sappy or overly sentimental. I'm just absolutely blown away by how much I loved this book. It scares me to think that I randomly picked this up from a sale shelf because I liked the cover - I had not heard of this book and it was sheer chance that put it in my hands. I shudder to think I might not have read this book and how less enriched my life might have been.

This book is going on my shelf next to Pat Conroy's The Prince of Tides. Anyone who knows me well will know what a high honor that is. What are you waiting for?! Get out and grab this book right now - get reading!!

Amanda says

What a fantastic debut novel! The characters are complex and the plot was good enough to capture my interest through the end. I was fascinated by Zell and the habits she picked up to cope with her husband's death. There were several phrases repeated regularly throughout the book that are very endearing; I loved "Zell's widow style" and the idiosyncrasies that were given to other characters.

Simply from Scratch was a pleasant surprise and I look forward to Bessette's next book.

Kelly says

Dear Goodreads,

First, let me thank you for the free book. You are awesome in so many ways, even Ms. Browning would be unable to count them. That being said, I'm sorry, but I cannot review this book properly. It wasn't because I was incapacitated (though I did seriously consider utilizing this method to make it more fun) or because I'm anti-foodie (though I really don't mind if my burger is cooked at a McDonald's or Little Owl's. Hell, more power to those with a love for food and the preparation that goes into making it). And as far as love and all the emotions that accompany it...people, there is nothing I adore more than L.O.V.E..

My real problem, the sole reason I can't write a review: I can't remember it. It was completely forgettable. Wait, I'm lying. There is one thing I remember and that's the style of writing. I didn't dig it. It was coarse, simplistic, and lazy. That's it. That's all I got. I don't remember loving or hating the plot, characters, etc. Just that it was good enough to keep reading, but ho-hum enough to have made no lasting impression.

So, why a 3 you ask? Because I don't love food, I'm not really that big on Chick Lit and because maybe it really all does come down to right place/right time and those reasons deserve to be taken into account. I entered the giveaway to try something different, thanks for the sampler.

Miko Lee says

This was an entertaining, quick, one sitting read focused on a young widow, her next door neighbors (a 9 year old girl and her hunky law school attending dad) as they embark on entering a cooking contest. Ok so right there the story is told, but it is fun in the telling. Very much a beach read, but alas where is the sun?? I was irritated that the cover photo art features a girl's hands holding a cake pan. Her hands are very pale and this bugged me since the girl is African American. Jeez, didn't the cover artist read the book? Aside from that a fun chick lit offering.

Claire says

This is an entirely charming tale of Zell, Ingrid and Garrett amid a cast of wonderful, warm, wacky small-town characters set in snowy little Wippamunk.

Zell is still reeling more than a year from the day she learned that Nick died instantly in a freak accident while on a mission in post Katrina New Orleans. Taking a shot at redemption, she decides to enter the Polly Pinch of Love Live Desserts that Warm the Soul baking contest. This is a leap because Nick did All the cooking before he died. Entering the kitchen is not just entering a foreign country, it is entering Nick's country. Slammed with grief at almost every turn, Zell's baby steps back to the land of the living are guided by her irrepressible young neighbor Ingrid who has demons of her own to slay.

It is a joy to watch these lovely, loving characters and hear their unique and affectionate voices as they struggle with and meet the challenges of being better, stronger and truly kind.

Matthew Quick says

Beautiful novel written by a beautiful person.

Kerry says

I really liked a lot of the Massachusetts and New England references in this book. Zell's husband died a little over a year ago during a mission trip for Katrina relief. She is not a great cook but when her neighbor's daughter volunteers to help her win a contest she can't say no. This encounter may have happened when she almost burned down her kitchen but who asked.

The story is light and fun. The romance is really light and not the focus. The characters are fun and they form great friendships, as well as Zell reconnecting with old friendships.

Girls Gone Reading says

First, let's accentuate the positive. The chronology of *Simply from Scratch* really drives it. Certain elements of the plot are left mysterious, and you really do want to know how it ends. I was completely unsure about what Zell's last present would be, whose Ingrid's mother would be, and how Nick was killed. I think these mysteries made this book rise above the normal "chick lit" fare and made it more literary.

Simply from Scratch also got me when Zell remembered how life used to be. Bessette had the excellent idea to give Nick, the dead husband, a voice. He is seen throughout the novel in past emails to Zell. I felt for Zell the most in the emails and "memory smacks" that she relived along the way. I could tell that she really lost something.

Now, her "widow style"-that I did have some issues with. For example, her "widow style" includes speaking to her dog in pirate-ese. A This language problem continued when Zell referred to her old home-ec teacher. The name was mentioned so much that I grew bored.

Simply from Scratch is the debut novel of Alicia Bessette, and I am hoping to see more things from her in the future. While it wasn't my favorite book, I did enjoy it, and I hope that the features of *Simply* that I didn't love can be ironed out in her next work.

Joann says

3.5 stars.....all I could think about at the end was "what about the dog!?!"

Evan says

Alicia Bessette's debut marries a big social issue with an intimate story of mourning. From the opening page there's a sad edge to the humor found in Zell's narration that neatly highlights both the setting (a wintery Massachusetts's town) and the tenuous bonds between characters that once felt united forever. The relationship between Zell and Ingrid gives the story its best, most emotionally profound moments -- moreso than the romantic moments between Zell and Ingrid's determined but struggling single-dad. I assume Bessette understands that a novel about recovering from the loss of a husband one loves completely would be made trite by a storyline that revolved solely around a love interest. More importantly, though, this is not a book about one connection but many connections -- from the bonds of local townspeople to the unexpected links between people brought together through tragedies big (Katrina) and small (the death of a husband that everyone loved).

I read this book in just two sittings, propelled forward by the voice and curiosity as to how things would work out (hoping it would not be a neat, overly sweet finish -- the kind I'm usually not satisfied by when there's a major social crisis involved). As it turns out, I was not disappointed, because *Simply From Scratch*, despite all the things fiction can 'get away' with, does not pretend to be about a perfect world with perfect people; instead it's a book with the invisible, difficult to vanquish villains of pain and loss. Ultimately, the Katrina backstory involving Zell's husband (whose death is directly related to his time in New Orleans) fits perfectly in terms of tone -- the details of the Katrina aftermath stand on their own and also work as a metaphor for Zell's own life disaster -- how she will have to save what she can from the rubble.

While this can be a difficult line to walk, Bessette doesn't leave the reader thinking that Katrina is a convenient contemporary issue that serves her characters. She avoids insulting the survivors of that real tragedy by celebrating survival and community in both storylines. It's a compelling use of the real life moment. In fact, I think the author would be more than capable of delving into Katrina more directly in a future book.

Deborah says

Alice Bessette's *SIMPLY FROM SCRATCH* was an enjoyable read...sort of a quirky little story with interesting characters. I liked the fact that it wasn't just another happy ending--not that the ending was unhappy, but all of the loose ends weren't tied up in a perky bow.

Zell, the main character, is a young widow. Her husband has been dead for three years, yet she can't seem to get past his death at all. She doesn't mix with their old friends, and lives a reclusive life in their home with their adopted greyhound.

Next door, a young girl, Ingrid Knox, is learning to cope with life without her mother, who abandoned her at birth. Because Ingrid believe a cooking show host to be her mother, she subscribes to the woman's magazine, and wants to learn to cook.

Zell is delivered one of Ingrid's magazine's by mistake, and decides (despite the fact that she knows nothing about cooking) to enter a cooking contest where the award prize is \$20,000 in cash--the amount of money her deceased husband wanted to raise to give to Katrina victims. Zell is determined. She wears Nick's camouflage apron and tries her hardes to make something that "Warms the soul" as the contest describes. Instead, she causes a fire in her oven that brings Ingrid and her father into Zell's life, and reunites her with

many of Nick's friends in the volunteer fire department.

Alicia Bessette writes in a way that is tender and honest. When she makes her story about friendship, celebrating life, and being able to let go. *SIMPLY FROM SCRATCH* is both humorous and touching. As we watch the relationship between Zell and Ingrid and Ingrid's father blossom. Zell begins to unfold, and reach out to old friends, and lets herself be vulnerable once more to new relationships.

Zell and Ingrid make it to the finalists with their strange but interesting dessert, but the real prize is in how teaming together for the contests brings these two unlikely characters together. This is a book I would recommend!

Ben says

I wasn't expecting this at all; I certainly didn't expect it to thump my heart around like it did. Look at the cover. I bought it because it's written by a fraternity brother's sister-in-law. I figured, hell, she's got the guts to drop everything and freelance fulltime, I should support the cause. I figured I'd get around to it someday, would read about 30 pages, find that it wasn't my thing (I mean look at the cover!), and maybe let my girlfriend or sister read it or something.

And the funny thing is, I'm still not sure why I *did* start reading it over all the other books ahead of it in the queue. Did I want to get it over with, so I could say I gave it a shot? I have no clue. It was sitting in front of me and I picked it up and started reading. That's all I know.

But God I'm glad I did. It is a beautiful, beautiful novel, and it touched me in a different way than most novels do. From the get-go the narrator was an interesting and likable (though flawed) person; someone that could entertain me, someone I genuinely liked. And Bessette was perfect with the slow reveal: you learn information as you go; slowly your questions are answered and the holes filled. "*Babysitting? At thirty-four years old? Well, maybe that's my widow style. My awesome widow style.*" See the personality in the voice? You want to have a conversation with this person. But the quote is revealing, too -- and given the context, completely seamless.

I talked to myself while reading, saying weird, embarrassing things like, "I had to get healthy before my heart would grow, so I could appreciate this." I said that to myself out loud! It's kind of a "yuck" thing to say: it sounds cheesy, right? But it's g.d. true.

(I also talked like a pirate a few times....)

So why did this book make my eyes moist? And what makes it so beautiful? It's still coming to me, but I'll try to impart what I can. Part of it, for sure, is its *realness*. A story about a widow, whose husband died while helping in New Orleans after Katrina, could have easily been written coldly, in a painfully detached manner by someone who didn't "get it." Or it could have been too soppy and dramatic, and therefore unrealistic. It's the little things that are shown, and over a year after the narrator's husband's death, it's those little things that still affect her and continue to make life difficult.

And you know what? That's pretty much how life goes. *Life* is full of memory smacks of past situations. *Life* is the slow reveal. *Life* is growth; and real growth is always slow. *Life* is the coffee brewing in the morning, and your dog by your side while you try to cook. It's those little details of everyday life that we take for granted; that we don't even realize. It's calming to be reminded of these things, because as unreliable as life

is, there's much consistency in a day: the wooden edge of the desk will always be so; the evaporation of my breath showing in the cold is always going to look the same. Reliable but then again slightly different: even that desk, despite being the same, will always be a little different too, because *you're* always different. Your feelings, your perceptions, are never the same as they were the moment before, and the interplay of all of this is *everyday*. And that is utterly beautiful.

Bessette knows that people aren't perfect; that things don't always work out. Yet she remains optimistic; her view of human nature is a positive one. I can tell she loves most of her characters. She gets that the small, unexpected events in life that involve other people are the events that we remember; that those are the events that shape us and impact the trial of our lives, and impact who we are: not the who we are in the moment, but the who we are thirty years from now; that part deep inside us that never fully goes away ... the *real* us.

And life is about the slow aches we hold in our hearts, too, isn't it? The little aches that never fully go away, but are brought to our full attention through memory smacks. This novel gave me a slow ache in my heart from early on. It was slight, but it never fully went away; just as it never fully went away for Zell, the narrator.

Finishing up, I want to say one last thing here. I have to say it, and I think Alicia may read this and hate me for the comparison, but it's what's in the cage in my chest and it's gotta come out. Her novel affected me the way John Irving novels do. I know, you say she may very well HATE John Irving. And that's fine. I'm talking about *affect* here, anyway -- and I'm talking about *me*. I'll try to illustrate it this way:

For me, Dostoevsky and Greene are scotch; Woolf and Kundera are wine; and Irving is beer. And Bassett to me is beer. When I drink beer and read, I want a slow calm -- a reality based, slow moving wisdom. And the reality of this novel -- the everydayness of it when someone has to live with a slight, ongoing sadness, is there. And that ongoing sadness is *life*.

"EJ closes his eyes at the sound of her warm-honey voice. He feels washed with sudden gratitude: Dogs go missing; people fight, divorce, and die; but he can call Charlene any time, day or night, and she consoles him."

You see, though, life is also full of other people; people that can help us make it through. People leave your life, and new people enter it. But that person you no longer hear on the phone isn't replaced. They'll never be replaced: they're a part of who *you* are, and they're a part of your heart. And what you hold in your heart will never fully go away.

And you know what? Even that inescapable sadness that we all have, has love in it. And I'll take a slow, wise, ongoing sadness that has love in it, any day of the week. And I think I'll crack open a beer and just think about my life tonight.

Camie says

Zell has been a widow for a year after losing her husband in a freak accident while on a rescue mission post hurricane Katrina, when nine year old Ingrid Knox and her father move in next door. The two become friends and decide to enter a cooking contest, which is a good distraction as both have issues they are trying to work through. Adding depth to the storyline there are also some mysteries to solve , some humor (as

some of their cooking projects sound truly awful) and of course some hearts to be mended. This is an easy to read book , with plenty of small town characters to love .
3.5 stars

Brenda says

I was drawn to the cover of this book when I discovered it among donations for my Heartland Little Free Libraries and I set it aside to read before sharing (Steward perk. Or hazard, lol). The story is both sweet and sad, and the ending has a few surprises (as it should). Overall, I enjoyed this heart warming book :)
