



Learning to Love: Sugar and SpiceLove by Degree

By Debbie Macomber



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Sugar and Spice

Librarian Jayne Gilbert needs a man—a man she can bring to her high school reunion. She wants to prove to her former classmates that she isn't the lonely bookworm they predicted she'd become. So, naturally, Jayne turns to a book. It's called *How to Pick Up a Man*. And it works, even if she attracts the attention of good-looking Riley Chambers only because she's *carrying* that book, not because she followed its advice!

Love by Degree

Going back to college, hitting the books. That's Ellen Cunningham's new life. But money's a little tight and she's lucky enough to find inexpensive lodging in a house with three young college boys. Ellen plays housemother, a situation that works for everyone—except Reed Morgan, the absentee owner. He's not pleased to find his house occupied by a bunch of college kids and Ellen. *Especially* Ellen.

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Learning to Love: Sugar and SpiceLove by Degree By Debbie Macomber Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #765788 in Books
- Brand: Mira
- Published on: 2011-11-22
- Released on: 2011-11-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.62" h x 1.04" w x 4.21" l, .35 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 384 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Debbie Macomber is...a bona fide superstar." -Publishers Weekly

"Popular romance writer Macomber has a gift for evoking the emotions that are at the heart of the genre's popularity."

- Publishers Weekly

Debbie Macomber writes characters who are as warm and funny as your best friends."

-New York Times bestselling author Susan Wiggs

"Debbie Macomber is one of the most reliable, versatile romance authors around."

-Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

"As always, Macomber draws rich, engaging characters."

-Publishers Weekly

"Macomber is a master storyteller; any one of these characters could have been a stereotype in less talented hands. Instead, these women and their stories are completely absorbing."

-RT Book Reviews on The Shop on Blossom Street

"Macomber's assured storytelling and affirming narrative is as welcoming as your favorite easy chair."

-Publishers Weekly on Twenty Wishes

"Macomber's latest...glows with genuine goodness and great emotional warmth."

--John Charles, Chicago Tribune on Hannah's List

"Debbie Macomber tells women's stories in a way no one else does."

--BookPage

"Macomber is an adept storyteller...many will be entertained by this well-paced story about four women finding happiness and fulfillment through their growing friendship."

--Publishers Weekly on The Shop on Blossom Street

About the Author

Debbie Macomber, with more than 100 million copies of her books sold worldwide, is one of today's most popular authors. The #1 New York Times bestselling author is best known for her ability to create compelling characters and bring their stories to life in her books. Debbie is a regular resident on numerous

bestseller lists, including the New York Times (70 times and counting), USA TODAY (currently 67 times) and Publishers Weekly (47 times). Visit her at www.DebbieMacomber.com.

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"You're going, aren't you?" Gloria Bailey asked for the third time.

And for the third time Jayne Gilbert stalled, taking a small bite of her egg-salad sandwich. She always ate egg salad on Tuesdays. "I don't know."

The invitation to her class reunion lay in the bottom of Jayne's purse, taunting her with memories she'd just as soon forget. The day was much too glorious to think about anything unpleasant. It was now mid-May, and the weather was finally warm enough to sit outside as they had lunch at a small cafe near the downtown Portland library.

"You'll regret it if you don't go," Gloria continued with a knowing look.

"You don't understand," Jayne said, pushing her glasses onto the bridge of her nose. She set aside the whole-wheat sandwich. "I was probably the only girl to graduate from St. Mary's in a state of grace."

Gloria tried unsuccessfully to swallow a chuckle.

"My whole senior year I had to listen while my classmates told marvelous stories about their backseat adventures," she said wryly. "I never had any adventures like that."

"And ten years later you still have no tales to tell?"

She nodded. "What's worse, all those years have slipped by, and I've turned out exactly as my classmates predicted. I'm a librarian and living alone—*alone* being the operative word."

Jayne even looked the same. The frames of her glasses were more fashionable now, but her hair was the same shade of brown—the color of cedar chips, just a tad too dark to be termed mousy. She'd kept it the same length, too, although she preferred it clasped at the base of her neck these days. She no longer wore the school's uniform of red blazer jacket and navy pleated skirt, but she wore another one, of sorts. The straight black skirt or tailored pants, white silk blouse and business jacket were her daily attire.

Her romantic dreams had remained dreams, and the love in her heart was showered generously upon the children who visited her regularly in the library. Jayne was the head of the children's department, while Gloria was a reference librarian. Both of them enjoyed their jobs.

"That's easy to fix," Gloria returned with a confidence Jayne lacked. "Go to the reunion looking different. Go dressed to the teeth, and bring along a gorgeous male who'll make you the envy of every girl in your class."

"I can't be something I'm not." Jayne didn't bother to mention the man. If she hadn't found a suitable male in ten years, what made Gloria think she could come up with one in two months?

"For one night you can be anything you want."

"It's *not* that easy," Jayne felt obliged to argue.

Until yesterday, before she'd sorted through her mail, she'd been content with her matter-of-fact existence. She liked her apartment and was proud of her accomplishments, however minor. Her life was uncomplicated, and frankly, she liked it that way.

But the last thing Jayne wanted was to go back and prove to her classmates that they'd been right. The thought was too humiliating. When she was a teenager, they'd taunted her as the girl most likely to succeed—behind the pages of a book. All her life, Jayne had been teased about her love for reading. Books were everything to her. She was the only child of doting parents who'd given up the hope of ever having children. Although her parents had been thrilled at her late arrival, Jayne often wondered if they'd actually known what to do with her. Both were English professors at a Seattle college and it seemed natural to introduce her to their beloved world of literature at an early age. So Jayne had spent her childhood reading the classics when other girls were watching TV, playing outside and going to birthday parties. It wasn't until she reached her teens that she realized how much of a misfit she'd become. Oh, she had friends, lots of friends... Unfortunately the majority of them lived between the covers of well-loved books.

"You need a man like the one across the street," Gloria said.

"What man?" Jayne squinted. "The one in the raincoat."

"Him?" The tall man resembled the mystery guy who lived in her apartment building. Jayne thought of him that way because he seemed to work the oddest hours. Twice she'd seen him in the apartment parking lot making some kind of transaction with another man. At the time she'd wondered if he was a drug dealer. She'd immediately discounted the idea as the result of an overactive imagination.

"*Look* at him, Jayne. He's a perfect male specimen. He's got that lean hardness women adore, and he walks as if he owns the street. A lot of women would go for him."

Watching the man her friend had pointed out, Jayne was even more convinced he was her neighbor. They'd met a few times in the elevator, but they'd just exchanged nods; they'd never spoken. He lived on the same floor, three apartments down from hers. Jayne had been living near him for months and never really noticed the blatantly masculine features Gloria was describing.

"His jaw has that chiseled quality that drives women wild," Gloria was saying.

"I suppose," Jayne concluded, losing interest. She forced her attention back to her lunch. There was something about that man she didn't trust.

"Well, you aren't going to find someone to take to your class reunion by sitting around your apartment," Gloria muttered.

"I haven't decided if I'm going yet." But deep down, Jayne wanted to attend. No doubt it was some deep-seated masochistic tendency she had yet to analyze.

"You should go. I think you'd be surprised to see how everyone's changed."

That was the problem; Jayne *hadn't* changed. She still loved her books, and her life was even more organized now than it had been when she was in high school. Ten years after her graduation, she'd still be the object of

their ridicule. "I don't know what I'm going to do," she announced, hoping to put an end to the discussion.

Hours later, at her apartment, Jayne sat holding a cup of green tea while she fantasized walking into the class reunion with a tall, strikingly handsome man. He would gaze into her eyes and bathe her in the warm glow of his love. And the girls of St. Mary's would sigh with envy.

The problem was where to find such a man. Not any man, but that special one who'd turn women's heads and make their hearts pound wildly.

Stretching out her legs and crossing her bare feet at the ankle, Jayne released a steady breath and conjured up her image of the perfect male. She'd read so many romances in her life, from the great classics to contemporary titles, that the vision of the ideal man—nothing like the one Gloria found so fascinating—appeared instantly in her mind. He would be tall, with thick, curly black hair and eyes of piercing blue. A man with sensitivity, desires and goals. Someone who'd accept her as she was...who'd think she was a special person. She wanted a man who could look past her imperfections and discover the woman inside.

A troubled frown creased her brow. She knew that for too many years, she'd buried herself in books, living her life vicariously through the escapades of others. The time had come to abandon her sedentary life and form a plan of action. Gloria was right—she wasn't going to find a man like that while sitting in her apartment. Drastic needs demanded drastic measures.

Rising to her feet Jayne took off her glasses and pulled the clasp from her hair. The curls cascaded over her shoulder, and she shook her head, freeing them. Plowing her fingers through her hair, she vowed to change. Or at least to try. Yes, she felt content with her life, but she had to admit there was something—or rather *someone*—missing.

Not until Jayne had left her apartment and was inside the elevator did it occur to her that she hadn't the slightest idea of where to meet men. Mentally she eliminated the spots she knew they congregated—places like taverns, pool halls and sports arenas. Her hero wasn't any of those types. A singles bar? Did people even use that term anymore? She'd never gone to one, but it sounded like just the place for a woman on a man-finding mission. Gloria would approve.

Jayne walked out of her building and ten minutes later, she sat in the corner of a cocktail lounge several blocks away. It had the rather obscure name of Soft Sam's. An embarrassed flush heated her face as she wondered what had possessed her to enter this place. Each time an eligible-looking man sauntered her way, she slid farther down into her chair, until she was so low her eyes were practically level with the table. The men in this bar were not the ones of which dreams were made. Thank goodness the room was as dark as a theater, with candles flickering atop the small round tables. The pulsing music, surly bartender and raised voices made her uncomfortable. Repeatedly she berated herself for doing anything as naive as coming here. Her parents would be aghast if they knew their sweet little girl was sitting in what they'd probably call a den of iniquity.

Forcing herself to straighten, Jayne's fingers coiled around her icy drink, and the chill extended halfway up her arm. According to what everyone said, the internet and a bar were the best ways to meet men. She was wary of resorting to online dating services, but she might have to consider it. And as for the bars... What her friends hadn't told her was the *type* of man who frequented such places. A glance around her confirmed that this was not where she belonged. Still, her goal was important. When she returned to Seattle, she was going to hold her head up high. There would be an incredible man on her arm, and she'd be the envy of every girl

in her high school class. But if she had to lower her standards to this level, she'd rather not go back at all.

Her shoulders sagged with defeat. She'd been a fool to listen to Gloria. In her enthusiasm, Jayne had gone about this all wrong. A bar wasn't the place to begin her search; she should've realized that. *Books* would tell her what she needed to know. They'd never failed her yet, and she was astonished now that she could've forgotten something so basic.

Jayne squinted as she studied the men lined up at the polished bar. Even without her glasses, she could see that there wasn't a single man she'd consider taking to her reunion. The various women all seemed overdressed and desperate. The atmosphere in the bar was artificial, the surface gaiety forced and frenetic.

Coming here tonight had been a mistake. She felt embarrassed about letting down her hair and hiding her glasses in her purse—acting like someone she wasn't. The best thing to do now was to stand up and walk out of this place before someone actually approached her. But if it had taken courage to walk in, Jayne discovered that it took nearly as much to leave.

Unexpectedly the door of the lounge opened, dispersing a shaft of late-afternoon sunlight into the dim interior. Jayne pursed her lips, determined to escape. Turning to look at the latest arrival, she couldn't help staring. The situation was going from bad to intolerable. This man, whose imposing height was framed by the doorway, was the very one Gloria had been so excited about this afternoon. He quickly surveyed the room, and Jayne recognized him; he was definitely her neighbor. The few times they'd met in the elevator, Jayne had sensed his disapproval. She didn't know what she'd done to offend him, but he seemed singularly unimpressed by her, and Jayne had no idea why. On second thought, Jayne told herself, he'd probably never given her a moment's notice. In fact, he'd probably paid as much attention to her as she had to him—almost none.

His large physique intimidated her, and the sharp glance he gave her was just short of unfriendly. He was more intriguing than good-looking. Though she knew that some women, like Gloria, found him attractive, his blunt features were far too rugged to classify as handsome. His hair was black and thick, and he was well over six feet tall. He walked with a hint of aggression in every stride. Jayne doubted he'd back down from a confrontation. She didn't know anything about him—not even his name—but she would've thought this was the last place he'd look for a date. But then, anyone who glanced at her would assume she didn't belong here, either. And she didn't.

Standing up, Jayne squared her shoulders and pushed back her chair while she studied the pattern on the carpet. Without raising her eyes, she fastened her raincoat and tucked her purse strap over her shoulder. The sooner she got out of this regrettable place, the better. She'd prefer to make her escape without attracting his attention, although with her hair down and without her glasses, it was unlikely that he'd recognize her.

Unfortunately her action caught his eye and he paused just inside the bar, watching her. Jayne hated the superior glare that burned straight through her. Blazing color moved up her neck and into her pale cheeks, but she refused to give him the satisfaction of lowering her gaze.

Jayne walked decisively toward the exit, which he was partially blocking. Something danced briefly in his dark blue eyes and she swallowed nervously. Slowly he stepped aside, but not enough to allow her to pass. The hard set of his mouth drew her attention. Her determined eyes met his. Brows as richly dark as his ebony hair rose slightly, and she saw a glimmer of arrogant amusement on his face.

"Well, well. If it isn't Miss Prim and Proper."

Jayne knew her expression must be horrified—he *had* recognized her—but she gritted her teeth, unwilling to acknowledge him. "If you'll excuse me, please."

"Of course," he murmured. He grinned as he gave her the necessary room. Jayne felt like running, her heart pounding as if she already had.

Humiliated, she hurried past him and stopped outside to hold her hand over her heart. As fast as her fingers would cooperate, she took her glasses from her purse. What on earth would he think of her being in a place like this? She didn't look like her normal self, but that hadn't fooled this sharp-eyed man. If he said something to her when they met again, she'd have an excuse planned.

She brushed the hair from her face and trekked down the sidewalk. He wouldn't say anything, she told herself. To imagine he'd even give her a second's thought would be overreacting. The only words he'd ever said to her had been that one taunting remark in the bar. It was unlikely that he'd strike up a conversation with her now. Especially since he so obviously found her laughable.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ruth Barnett:

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to try and do! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or their friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic inside the park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Do you need to something different to fill your personal free time/ holiday? May be reading a book is usually option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to try out look for book, may be the book untitled Learning to Love: Sugar and SpiceLove by Degree can be excellent book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

Mary Olive:

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Michael Earl:

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Ronald Marinelli:

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