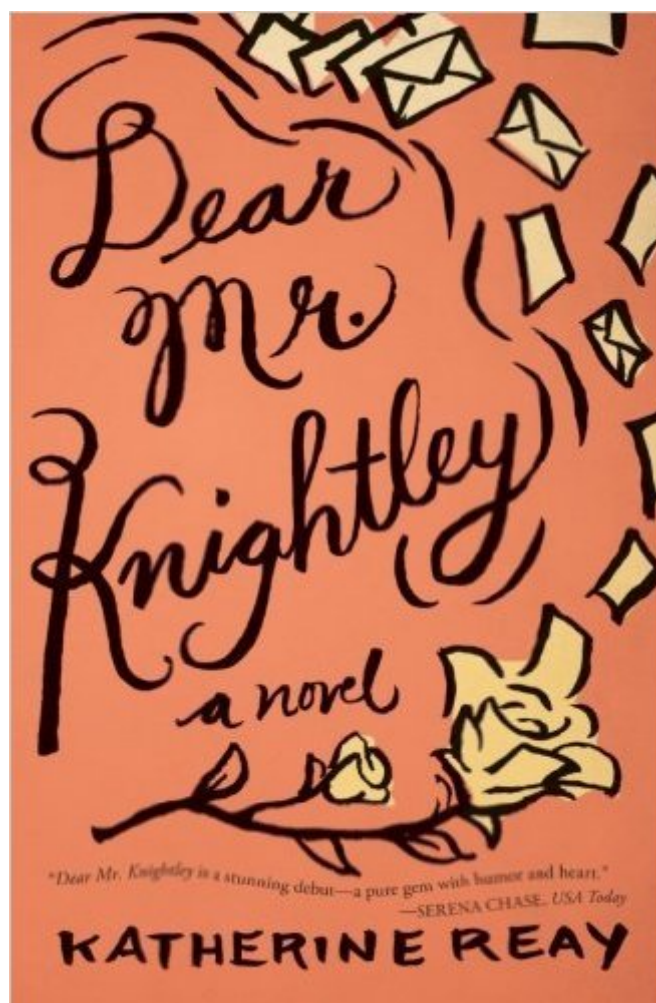


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Dear Mr. Knightley: A Novel



Synopsis

“Katherine Reay’s *Dear Mr. Knightley* kept me up until 2:00 a.m.; I simply couldn’t put it down.” —Eloisa James, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Once Upon a Tower*

Samantha Moore has always hidden behind the words of others—namely, her favorite characters in literature. Now, she will learn to write her own story—by giving that story to a complete stranger. Sam is, to say the least, bookish. An English major of the highest order, her diet has always been Austen, Dickens, and Shakespeare. The problem is, both her prose and conversation tend to be more Elizabeth Bennet than Samantha Moore. But life for the twenty-three-year-old orphan is about to get stranger than fiction. An anonymous, Dickensian benefactor (calling himself Mr. Knightley) offers to put Sam through Northwestern University’s prestigious Medill School of Journalism. There is only one catch: Sam must write frequent letters to the mysterious donor, detailing her progress. As Sam’s dark memory mingles with that of eligible novelist Alex Powell, her letters to Mr. Knightley become increasingly confessional. While Alex draws Sam into a world of warmth and literature that feels like it’s straight out of a book, old secrets are drawn to light. And as Sam learns to love and trust Alex and herself, she learns once again how quickly trust can be broken. Reminding us all that our own true character is not meant to be hidden, Reay’s debut novel follows one young woman’s journey as she sheds her protective persona and embraces the person she was meant to become. *Dear Mr. Knightley* is a stunning debut—a pure gem with humor and heart.

—Serena Chase, *USA Today* Includes Reading Group Guide Plus Bonus Material: Q & A with Katherine Reay and Sam’s Reading List

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sometimes you are given a gift that everyone assures you will be delightful but you aren't entirely sure the contents will be to your liking. The wrapping is appealing and the shape looks intriguing but you are still uncertain. You open it up and you are surprised by its unique richness and you wonder why you ever doubted! That was Katherine Reay's debut novel for me. I loved the premise, the cover was beautifully fanciful but a book composed entirely of letters? To write such an epistolary novel and pull it off successfully is hard and a debut novelist? I admit to a little skepticism but I'm thrilled to say Katherine pulled it off beautifully, and then some! Dear Mr Knightley captivated me, heart and soul, from beginning to end. The characters are beguiling to a fault ~ Sam's awkwardness, Kyle's brokenness, Mrs Muir's gentleness, Alex's charm, the Professor's protectiveness ~ each quickly wove their way into my heart. Katherine is a master of emotive prose, easily evoking my empathy, anger, passion, and eventually tears as Sam discovers that she is precious and worthy of love. There is a cleverness to Katherine's writing that is deeply refreshing ~ wry humour, romantic tenderness, and heart shattering honesty pour from these pages, as do wonderful quotes from the classics that readers will delight in discovering. Simply put, I adored this story and am thrilled beyond measure that 2014 will bring me another dose of Katherine's fabulous talent with Lizzy and Jane. Until then, I will comfort myself with additional readings of Dear Mr Knightley ~ yes, it is that good!

Dear Mr. Knightley tells the picturesque story of a young woman named Samantha who is not only an orphan, but a girl who's made - nearly - one mistake too many. After attempting to make it on her own, she's forced to return to the safety of Grace House, the place she grew up in and try earning back the scholarship offered by a mysterious benefactor who is known to her only as "Mr. Knightley." When the man agrees to reinstate Sam's scholarship, the only stipulation he asks is that she write him letters detailing her progress. During her year of journaling through letters, Sam learns the meaning of independence, self-worth and maybe... even love. Jane Austen has inspired thousands of contemporary pieces of candied fiction - both literary and cinematic. New author Katherine Reay uses the popularity of Austen-esque inspiration and crafts her story into a magnificently unique novel. One of 2013's debut authors, already Katherine has established herself as a name to keep an eye on. In 'Mr. Knightley,' readers are swept up on an emotional journey of hope, healing and finding home. I have to be honest, when I was ready to read the book, in my

typical reading habitual, I'd paged through the novel and read the author note prior to seriously reading it, and my opinion wasn't where I wanted it to be. This can be traced back to one thing - the style in which the book is written. Aside from an epilogue, the story is told, not just in the first person but entirely through letters, and it was a context that made me read with trepidation. Nonetheless I went through with reading and oh my, what a treat *Dear Mr. Knightley* was. These are the best kind of novels. Ripping up the "rules" for a usual contemporary novel, Reay reinvented the familiarity of the genre. All of the important key elements are there only with a new "twist." Beyond the inventive uses of prose and characters, there's also a beautiful realism to the story. Told elegantly through its heroine's letters (something that I am a sucker for - people getting to know each other through letters), the book is also chocked full of fun pop culture references, all of which left me giggling and each one blends seamlessly with the old-fashioned concept balancing with the witty, sharp literature references - everything from C.S. Lewis to Bronte. (And, this also seems the opportune moment to throw in how much I lovelovelove the Eloise reference - not sure that could have been played to a better advantage.) Samantha is a character easy to relate to, not necessarily because of her sad past but because she is scared to step outside her comfort zone, she is afraid that she's capable of doing something worth anyone's notice or time. Those of us who have ever dreamed of doing something that requires criticism or opening ourselves up to others will understand this - we've all struggled with being accepted or emotional around someone, and in reading this, Samantha was less "figment" and much more, real. In more instances than one I was both sympathetic and felt as if she and I shared many of the same insecurities or worries that life throws our way. Above all, those qualities are this debut's crowning glory - it's not just an expert piece of fiction, it becomes very "real." What Reay did for her heroine was strip her of all her protective shields so that Sam could find her own "voice" and stand out to be the person she never thought she would come to be. After all that, there's just this postscript left. Dear Katherine Reay, thank you for sharing *Mr. Knightley* with us. Sincere thanks to author Katherine Reay for providing a complimentary ARC copy of this book for reviewing purposes. Copyright © 2013 * Dreaming Under the Same Moon

In 1912, Jean Webster wrote a charming book called *Daddy Long Legs*. Webster's book was about an orphan sent to college by a wealthy but anonymous benefactor. In return for her education, all she had to do was write letters chronicling her experiences at school. Told through Judy's letters, the book follows as Judy finds her footing and sense of self outside of the orphanage, makes friends and eventually falls in love. Sound familiar? *Dear Mr. Knightley* is *Daddy Long Legs*, set in 2014 with a little Jane Austen fanaticism thrown in. Nothing original about it. While Katherine Reay's

version was well written, I was deeply disappointed that she couldn't produce something that wasn't blatantly lifted from an American classic. Skip this version and read the original -- it's eons better.

The beginning of this book showed great promise, but like many books based on an interesting premise, it went from a many-starred opening to a barely-starred ending. Any epistolary-style format runs into difficulties, but especially a one-sided correspondence. A single character has a great deal of weight to carry or the book becomes flat. The characters never rang true for me. The heroine is a 24-year-old graduate student who had a horrific childhood and lived on the streets for a time. And yet, she is extremely naive and immature. The hero doesn't seem like a man found in real life, but rather a construction devised by a woman. He is very sensitive, buys thoughtful gifts, and shares the heroine's knowledge of Jane Austen. He is even capable of quoting long passages of "Pride & Prejudice." I share their love of Austen, but have never been able to get my husband to so much as look inside the cover of "P&P." "No car chases" he always says with a grin. "Dear Mr. K." Tries to be many kinds of books in one: YA, Austen homage, contemporary Christian. As a result, it doesn't have a clear goal, and the constant shifting left me wishing to wander off and find another book to read.

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