



## At the Stroke of Midnight

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A meddling stepmother. Ominous secrets. And true love. Ella could really use a fairy godmother about now.

On the brink of losing her inheritance, Ella returns home to claim Diamond Hollow Ranch as her own, make amends with her stepmother, and live happily ever after. When Ella discovers her interfering stepmother has leased the ranch to the Duke family, she goes undercover and gets the job as groundskeeper for the ranch.

Stone Duke seeks refuge from the spotlight at Diamond Hollow Ranch. He is charmed when the intriguing landscape architect he hires does not recognize him from the press. This is such a refreshing change from the women who are only after his money that Stone hides his true identity from Ella, even while pursuing a relationship with her.

But when dangerous secrets from Ella's past come knocking at the ranch, can two hearts in disguise find a real-life, fairy-tale ending?

At the Stroke of Midnight is a modern Cinderella retelling.

All Fairly Western Tales are modern retellings of fairy tales with a Western flair. Each clean and wholesome novel can be read as a stand alone book.

## At the Stroke of Midnight Details

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Author : Kate Palmer

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## **From Reader Review At the Stroke of Midnight for online ebook**

### **Heather Green says**

This one was great up until about 60% through. It was clean and a fun story with likeable characters and an interesting story line. I was way into it to a point. I also loved the cover. Then it felt really rushed. It was like she tried too hard at the end to tie it to Cinderella with references to midnight. It felt thrown in and unnecessary. It felt like a let down from the first part of the book. In addition to the rushed feeling and Cinderella thing, I didn't give it a higher rating because the communication between Stone and Ella was lacking toward the end I didn't feel like they really resolved Stone's concerns about her dishonesty. I realize he talked with Cliff about it, but I felt there should have been something between Stone and Ella. He just suddenly forgave her. I'm undecided about whether or not I'd read it again.

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### **ToriLynn says**

#### **What fun!**

Clean wholesome fairy tale. Western twist brings a fun flair to the whole story. I wonder about Anita. The pure heart is a little too naive for reality though. Fortunately, fairy tales done have to be reality.

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### **Susan Horton says**

#### **What a Lovely Read!**

I read this wonderful tale this afternoon, unable to put it down. A contemporary twist on Cinderella, this well thought out story introduces Ella, a naive young woman who thinks the best of others, even her stepmother (who is suspicious from the get-go). Refreshingly written, emotional, sweet and romantic, this is worth a few hours' investment for the pleasure you will receive in return. Enjoy!

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### **Michelle says**

Was a cute concept for a modern day Cinderella but failed in the execution on several things. There were several plot holes like how did Ella get contact information for her stepmother's former families? Ella was super naive to the point of unbelievably and that got old fast. Also the ending was super rushed and there was very little communication and suddenly they were over their issues.

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### **Candice Allen says**

#### **Wonderful twist on an old fairy tale**

This story lives up to its name, a, sweet romance. Built with characters you can relate to and feel good about reading. I love the way she blended virtues into Ella and Stone nature and showed how serving and helping others creates a natural relationship. A clean romance to leave you feeling good. Highly recommend it.

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### **Kristi says**

#### **Great!**

I really enjoyed this "fairytales adaptation". It was so creative! The night of the gala "ball" was not at all what I was expecting! Good twist to the story - in a way combining two fairytales into this adaptation. I like both the main characters and their personalities. I am definitely interested in reading more about the family and other books by this author.

I lived on a small 5-acre "ranch" so I love reading books about ranch life. It was fascinating to learn about a career I had never heard of. I really enjoyed learning more and more about the history of the main character.

The only question it left me with was the true intentions of the step-daughter. We didn't get the opportunity to really learn much about her.

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### **Melody says**

#### **Interesting version of Cinderella!**

I quite enjoyed it. It was pretty short, so of course I wish there could've been a little more character development, but it was pretty good.

4 stars.

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### **Shash says**

I love fairy tale retellings! This is a great twist on Cinderella, with a contemporary western setting. So fun! I really enjoyed the characters and the storyline.

Stone and Ella are a great match! Both have such giving hearts. They had their secrets, but at the same time were open and honest with each other. Sounds like a contradiction, I know.

Ella always sees the good in others. Always! Which is a very good trait, but it drove me crazy when it came to Lucinda. I was on Hank's side there.

It was fun to meet Stone's brother and sister, who have their own books in the series. I can't wait to read them now!

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## **Mara says**

Ella loves Diamond Hollow Ranch, her family's cattle ranch and plans to spend the summer there working on the last project she needs to receive her master's degree in landscape architecture. If she has her degree by her 25th birthday the ranch she loves so much will be hers and no one, including her step-mother Lucinda, will be able to take it away from her. Ella tries to see the good in everyone, even Lucinda and her daughter Anita even though they aren't close.

Lucinda doesn't deserve to have Ella think the best of her. Not when she's trying to swindle Diamond Hollow Ranch right out from underneath her before she turns 25 years old. When Ella finds out the ranch has been leased for the summer to the Duke family she gets herself hired as a groundskeeper so she can continue to work on her project for college.

Jonas Stone Duke, Jr. will be living at Diamond Hollow Ranch for the summer, hiding from the press and planning the gala for one of his family's foundations.

I liked this retelling of Cinderella. Both main characters are trying to keep their true identities a secret from the other. After the male main character is introduced the chapters alternate the point of view between Ella and Stone. It's interesting to see what each of them thinks. I did think Ella was a little bit too naive to not suspect Lucinda (her step-mother) of evil doing sooner than she did. I was glad Stone's brother, Cliff, was there to talk some sense into him when he was upset that Ella had lied about her last name. I liked the closeness of the Duke family and how Ella seemed to fit in. This is my second Fairly Western Tale by Kate Palmer and I've enjoyed both of them.

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## **Bonnie says**

### **Re-written fairy tale...great stuff**

if you love the old standard Cinderella, you should enjoy this book, complete with the evil step mother. I absolutely loved the fact that this is a CLEAN romance with some mystery involved. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys romantic suspense novels.

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## **Megan says**

### **Great read!**

Spoilers: I won this book free from the author. It started out good then I saw how evil the step mother truly was and I almost stopped reading. I hate people taking advantage of others, and I didn't want to read a whole book of that. However just then Stone entered the picture and I couldn't put it down. Great read!

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## **Christina says**

### **4.5 Stars!**

This was such a great book- I loved the Cinderella theme and the way the author carried out the plot. The romance was sweet and tender, although it moved a bit too fast the last quarter of the book. Still a cute read-

I can't wait to read her other ones in the series!!

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### **Jennifer Robb says**

Possible Spoilers included:

This novel has underpinnings of the Cinderella fairy tale put into a contemporary ranch setting. Ella has the requisite evil stepmother and a stepsister.

My guess is the "glass slipper" is inheriting the family ranch, something Ella can only do if she completes her master's degree. And of course, with any fairy tale, you expect a "happily ever after".

There are many things that don't make sense to me in this novel, though. If the ranch is in trust, how can Lucinda Fairfax be making all these decisions about the ranch, including offering to sell it? There does seem to be a male trustee--so is he not doing his job to protect Ella's trust? That question is never answered or addressed. Was Lucinda hoping that she'd get money for the ranch from the Dukes and then leave them to find they'd been swindled? Or was she counting on being able to thwart Ella's degree and void the terms of the will?

Also never addressed is whether Anita knew what her mother was doing. Even if she didn't, shouldn't she have suspected that all of her fathers/step-fathers died within a few months of taking out insurance policies from her with Lucinda as the beneficiary? If the intent was that Anita wasn't part of the scam, I'm not sure I buy it. Especially since Lucinda was trying to set Anita up with Jonas/Stone.

I loved the characters of Hank and Susie. I'm glad Susie was willing to speak truth to Stone about Lucinda and Ella. I'm also glad Stone's own family was willing to see Ella's side and not just condemn her for lying to him. Instead, they encouraged Stone to go talk to her.

I wasn't prepared for what Lucinda had done. I knew she didn't like Ella and was working against her inheritance, but I didn't recognize a bigger conspiracy until it was revealed to Ella.

The novel also reminded me a bit of O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi" in that Ella was willing to give up the ranch to Stone and his family because she loved him and felt bad that he thought she'd misled him just to be able to inherit it, and in that Stone was willing to give up the ranch Lucinda had promised him because it belonged to the woman he loves.

But the reason I gave it 3 stars instead of more is that their relationship started with deceit on both sides of it. Neither was telling the other who they really were. Stone was somewhat honest in why he was there even though he didn't reveal his full name. Ella was only partially honest in why she was there. She lied by omission in not saying her final project for her master's was so that she could inherit the very land they were on. Now, I could excuse them not using their real names had they not been pursuing a romantic relationship with each other, but having so much deceit starting out is a bad way to start a romantic relationship that will last in my opinion.

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### **Teri says**

Great story I love the characters and the suspense. Ella was only doing what she could to save her family home. For Stone it was work and his foundation. This beautiful clean read about family and truth and love. This twisted plot is intriguing with characters who want to hold to the good in people even when proven otherwise. As titled a sweet romance to enjoy.

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### **Charissa says**

This was such a fun story. Ella returns home a year after her father's death to do her final landscape project for her master's degree on her family ranch. That is her last condition to finish in order to inherit the ranch on her 25th birthday. Her step-mother wants to help, but Ella can't let that happen. Every time her step-mother, Lucinda, steps in to help her, she wreaks havoc in her life. Trying to fix their relationship, Ella brings a gift to her step-mom, and learns that she's leasing her ranch to the rich Duke family for a huge party for the next few months. Ella decides to stay at the ranch and work on her project without her step-mom's knowledge. When a strange man walks into her bedroom, she is horrified, but soon learns he is the operations manager for the Duke family. The truth she doesn't know is he is actually Stone Duke, soon to be owner when he buys this ranch from her step-mother. Neither of them knows who the other is, but they fall into an easy friendship until secrets are revealed that disrupt their happiness.

I really loved the characters in this book. Ella is the sweetest, kindest person. Naïve, but charitable. I couldn't fault her desire to find good in everyone, even her evil step-mother. Stone is a good guy, but misunderstood. I loved seeing their romantic relationship bloom and grow. The ranch setting was awesome, and I wanted Ella to make all her dreams for it come true. This is a modern Western cowboy twist on the Cinderella story, but it's way better than the original fairy tale. Super fun read that I couldn't stop reading.

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