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A Noble Masquerade (Hawthorne House Book #1)



Synopsis

Sparkling Regency Romance from a Captivating New Voice
Lady Miranda Hawthorne acts every inch the lady, but inside she longs to be bold and carefree. Entering her fourth Season and approaching spinsterhood in the eyes of society, she pours her innermost feelings out not in a diary but in letters to her brother's old school friend, a duke--with no intention of ever sending these private thoughts to a man she's heard stories about but never met. Meanwhile, she also finds herself intrigued by Marlow, her brother's new valet, and although she may wish to break free of the strictures that bind her, falling in love with a servant is more of a rebellion than she planned. When Marlow accidentally discovers and mails one of the letters to her unwitting confidant, Miranda is beyond mortified. And even more shocked when the duke returns her note with one of his own that initiates a courtship-by-mail. Insecurity about her lack of suitors shifts into confusion at her growing feelings for two men--one she's never met but whose words deeply resonate with her heart, and one she has come to depend on but whose behavior is more and more suspicious. When it becomes apparent state secrets are at risk and Marlow is right in the thick of the conflict, one thing is certain: Miranda's heart is far from all that's at risk for the Hawthornes and those they love.

Book Information

File Size: 3863 KB

Print Length: 370 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0764214322

Publisher: Bethany House Publishers (September 1, 2015)

Publication Date: September 1, 2015

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B011LYXSRA

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #7,566 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #44 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Religious #44 inÂ Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Literature & Fiction > Historical #49 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks >

Customer Reviews

A Noble Masquerade is the first book in Kristi Ann Hunter's Hawthorne House series, although there is an e-novella that comes before it called A Lady of Esteem. In fact, A Lady of Esteem was what got me hooked on Kristi Ann's writing. You see, A Noble Masquerade is her first full length novel. A little over a month ago, she published her novella as a free e-book, and I happened to stumble upon it. I'm all for free books, and the description made it sound like something right up my alley, so I downloaded it. Can I just say that was one of the best decisions I ever made? When I think of first-time authors, I do think talent, but I also know that they haven't published anything, so they don't have near as much experience as older authors do. Although they may have a great story and a wonderful writing style, they just haven't been at it for long, so I don't put my expectations too high. It will be a good book, I tell myself, but their later works will be better. That was not the case with Kristi Ann. Before I had even made it halfway through A Lady of Esteem, I knew she was a very talented author. By the time I started A Noble Masquerade, I was aware that her writing is better than many more experienced authors, if only because she knows how to weave together a story. Obviously I need to let go of the stereotypes. Miranda Hawthorne is by far one of my favorite heroines. As a privileged woman of society, you would think she would be difficult to relate to, but that is far from the truth. Always pressured to be the perfect lady, Miranda feels that she must hide all of her feelings deep inside herself; her only release being in writing letters to her brother, Griffith's, friend, the Duke of Marshington.

I described the prequel novella to this book, A Lady of Esteem as a good, light-hearted, fun read, and it was. As its big sister, A Noble Masquerade had many of the same admirable traits – a socially awkward and often unconventional heroine, with a big heart and a sense of adventure. Some- colourful family members as a supporting cast, and plenty of mishaps, and social customs of the ton that (admit it) most of us have come to love in Regency tales, as well as a sprinkling of romance, and intrigue with the espionage sub-plot. So on the plus-side it was an enjoyable, well-written novel. Light yet immersive, fun and (generally) clean. Yet- I didn't enjoy it as much as the accompanying novella, and had a couple of major issues. I suppose the first of these could be described as something of an identity crisis in the plot, style and execution. The book, I think was meant to be light and fun (almost the point of regency spoof, I felt at times) but at the same time had some serious content with the espionage, scheming relatives, and possible seditious plot in the

background. To me, these just did not always seem to mix very well, and at times it seemed hard to take one seriously alongside the other. I mean, Ryland was meant to be an experienced spy of many years- -so he was not really meant to be getting his head turned by pretty girls, or walking into traps. So I suppose I would say that some incidents and details seemed to be lacking in plausibility or credibility, and were perhaps resolved too quickly? Perhaps this situation was exacerbated by my finding things a bit hard to follow at times (I mean what did the relatives have to do with someone possibly feeding secrets to Napoleon- or were these two different situations altogether). Am I just being dense?

What a cast of characters! Goodness! And it was all so fun. Even when the characters weren't trying to be funny, of course it was the funniest. Miranda had been trained all her life to be a lady, but the free spirit in her broke through occasionally. In fact, she had to concentrate really hard to heed all the rules her mother had drilled into her. But this spirit is what helps her to see people for who they are rather than just acting toward them the way society tells her she should. Which brings me to how she views her brother's valet. She sees a real man, with valid points of view and qualities that are attractive. This wouldn't do in the ton. So she had to speak with him as a "person" in secret. This all started when a letter she wrote to a duke was inadvertently sent to him. These letters she's written (since she was quite young to her brother's college friend she's never met) were actually a fun way of writing a journal. They were private thoughts she locked in a box in her room, never to be seen by another human. Now one had been sent and she is surprised when she gets an answer in a week. This starts an 8 (or more) week communication, turning into an interesting "friendship". Little does she know this Duke is someone she actually knows and is in close contact with often. Meanwhile relatives and acquaintances that are a part of her everyday life are wonderful and fun to interact with. I love the way Miranda's thoughts or replies are often funny, while not meaning to be. Such as when her sister embarrasses her by saying Miranda insisted on calling on some gentlemen, Miranda's thoughts were, "Poison. She was going to poison her little sister's chocolate in the morning."

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