



# Keeping the Castle

*Patrice Kindl*

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Seventeen-year-old Althea is the sole support of her entire family, and she must marry well. But there are few wealthy suitors--or suitors of any kind--in their small Yorkshire town of Lesser Hoo. Then, the young and attractive (and very rich) Lord Boring arrives, and Althea sets her plans in motion. There's only one problem; his friend and business manager Mr. Fredericks keeps getting in the way. And, as it turns out, Fredericks has his own set of plans . . .

## Keeping the Castle Details

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# From Reader Review Keeping the Castle for online ebook

**Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says**

*"I love you, Althea—you are so beautiful," murmured the young man into my ear.  
I looked up at him from under my eyelashes. "I love you too," I confessed. I averted my gaze  
and added privately, "You are so rich."  
Unfortunately, I apparently said this aloud.*

Well, at least she's honest.

**This book is reminiscent, however briefly, of Jane Austen's *Emma*, ruined by a love triangle and no romance.** It is just darling, there are funnily "posh" names like Bumbershook and Throstletwist, a "Crooked Castle" with a moat (without fish---they've all been eaten), and a **Happily-Ever-After**. Unfortunately, it was bogged down by the lack of romance. This would ordinarily be a good thing, except, well, **I read this book wanting a romance.** Imagine that!

Snow will sometimes fall in June. Khanh will occasionally seek romance. Yes, it does occur, albeit rarely.

Frankly speaking, this is the extent of the romance within this book:

Guy: \*SNEERS\*  
Girl: \*mutters\* Bloody prick  
Guy: YOU ARE INCOMPETENT  
Girl: I WILL NEVER MARRY YOU \*bats eyelashes at someone else\*  
Guy: OMG WHY ARE YOU SO DUMB? Here, let me help you out.  
Girl: YOU'RE STILL A JERK  
Guy: I LOVE YOU  
Girl: WAIT, WHAT? Oh, I love you too! ?\_?

There is a **love triangle** in this book, and it pisses me off because there is no case for either of the young men involved. One is the perfect man, a handsome young Baron, a posher Mr. Bingley from *Pride and Prejudice*, if you will. The other a brusque, rude, ill-mannered jerk, the Baron's commoner cousin. The main character, the very Emma-like **Althea** has to choose between the two. This is a seriously sweet book, Althea is a very likeable character; she is vain, but completely pragmatic, she has to be, why?

The Summary:

*Our only hope was in marriage. Mine.*

The lovely Althea Crawley hasn't a single pence to her name, therefore it comes as a rather monumental task for her to save their ancestral home. Or rather, ancestral wreck. Althea's wildly romantic grandfather built a castle by the sea only to see it crumble into dust and disrepair after he squandered his entire fortune on the castle, leaving nothing to the castle's upkeep---or his heirs. The castle may look like a wedding cake threw up on Camelot.

*Indeed, much of the structure was nonfunctional in any but a decorative sense, with winding stone stairs leading to nowhere, murder holes so improperly placed that they could pose no*

*danger even to the most oblivious of intruders, and a hodgepodge of towers and battlements sticking out at random.*

But it's their family home, and Althea is determined to keep it in the family. **By whatever means necessary.** And that includes some pretty unpleasant means.

*"Perhaps I should consider an elderly suitor," I mused. "They are more easily managed, I believe. And they often have defective hearing, which might be quite an advantage."*

Althea is not alone, she's got a loving mother, a four-year old brother, and two wealthy (but unhelpful in any way) stepsisters named Prudence and Charity.

Hint: the stepsisters are neither prudent nor charitable.

Althea's one fault is that she has a tendency to speak before she thinks. Thus, the failed marriage proposal at the beginning of this review, but fear not, for **Lord Boring is coming into town**. Or rather, into Lesser Hoo. Lord Boring is the rather unfortunate title of a young Baron named Simon Westing. He's, well, perfect! Money, a title, and handsome to boot.

*The knowledge that he owned this imposing house and extensive property could only enhance his fine face and figure, which were further flattered by his faultless evening dress.*

In contrast, his cousin, Frederick is a commoner, he's in BUSINESS (so lower-class), he's rude, ill-mannered, and to top it off...

*He was an amazingly unattractive man.  
It was the black scowl he bestowed on my mother and me that ruined his looks and rendered him repellent.*

So now it's looking interesting. And to top it off, there's the Marquess. He's a little bit too old for her, and he's a peer. It doesn't look like Althea has much of a chance with the Marquess.

*If he did remarry, it would be expected that he would choose a woman from one of the great families of England, not an impoverished young girl from the back of beyond in a dilapidated castle by the edge of the North Sea.*

But one thing's for certain.

*Life in little Lesser Hoo had become much more interesting of late.*

#### Similarities to *Emma*:

*Everyone would be much better off if I arranged matters to suit myself.  
Let them find out the solution themselves. With a little assistance from me, of course.*

Emma is beautiful, rich, and without a care in the world. Althea's not that carefree. The only thing they have in common is their beauty and their tendency to take over peoples' lives.

Althea didn't start off that way. She began the story with one purpose, to find an advantageous marriage. Slowly she realizes that she needs to manipulate the situation to get her stepsisters away, to get alone time with Lord Boring, which is simply impossible, since Frederick seems to be underfoot ALL THE FUCKING

TIME.

*"Why, oh why does His Lordship suffer the company of that odious man?"*

The more new people she meets, the more plans she has in mind. If she likes a friend, she feels the need to "help" that friend along with their relationship. Of course, everything should work out in Althea's interest first, but she's still got everyone's best interest at heart! **Does it come as a surprise at all that Althea makes a series of regrettable decisions?**

*I stared at her, stricken. What had I done?*

Althea's Beauty: She is 17, she is beautiful, but **her beauty is never directly shown in the book**. I don't even know what she looks like, all we know is that she is tremendously lovely. She knows it, she wields her beauty with pride. **Althea's beauty is the only thing she has.**

*I had always known, ever since I was thirteen years old and men first began to look at me, that beauty was power, the only real power (other than cash in hand) that a woman could possess. I knew it was transitory, and must be used shrewdly and well in the few years it lasted.*

She uses her beauty to find a wealthy partner, but she HAS to, so that's fine with me. She is never cruel, she never hates people needlessly. She understands that looks are only superficial, and they do not affect the person beneath. She befriends a plain girl, Miss Vincy, without ever judging her appearance.

*She was a good and gentle creature, as well as a talented and intelligent woman, who would make the Baron a better wife than I. Beauty is a coin squandered by time, but Miss Vincy's virtues would last throughout her life.*

The Romance: The most frustrating thing about the book, **because there was so little of it**. Lord Boring is rather...boring, it's true. There is nothing wrong with him, and that was what bothered me. **There was nothing wrong with Lord Boring, so why is the book trying to enforce a love triangle on us?!** Compared to him, Frederick was a jerk. He constantly refers to Althea as "Miss Hrrm" because he can't be fucked to remember what her last name is. He is shoddily dressed, he can't be fucked to wear normal clothing at a ball. He goes around desecrating her ancestral home...

*"These portraits ought to be cleaned," he said, ignoring my suggestion and fiddling with the painting of the little dog. "I believe that a penknife inserted here under the frame would allow us to see—"*

*"Mr. Fredericks!" I cried. "Please!"*

He pokes around ancient monuments around her home, like why the FUCK would you try to screw around with something like Stonehenge?! **Frederick almost gets her brother and dog killed, only to complain about losing his boots in the process of saving them.**

*"Be careful of those," Mr. Fredericks instructed, having thrust the second boot square into my face. "They cost a monstrous sum of money. No, don't throw them, you'll scratch the leather."*

Sure, he saves them, but here's the thing, it was HIS neglect that endangered them in the first place.

Their romance isn't a romance in the traditional sense, not in the Regency sense. There's a lot of arguments and a lot of conflicts without a whole lot of emotion, so that things don't feel realistic when they eventually realize their feelings for one another. I wanted a sweet romance, but I just didn't get any of that. This book

did surprise me, I didn't expect things to happen the way they did, so props for that, but otherwise, this is rather a disappointment, however cute it was.

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## Jessica says

A charming little book, very much in the style of an Austen novel. I keep seeing it called a combination of PRIDE & PREJUDICE and I CAPTURE THE CASTLE, which is very accurate, though Kindl certainly brings her own clever writing and plotting to the board.

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## TheBookSmugglers says

Original review posted on The Book Smugglers

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single girl in possession of a deprecated Castle and lacking a fortune must be in want of a rich husband. Althea Crawley is a seventeen—year-girl who is the main support of her entire family, the effective head of their household and the only hope they have to keep their Castle for her younger brother. As such, she must marry well and soon. Unfortunately for the Crawleys, despite her unparalleled beauty, Althea's strong opinions and loud mouth often cause her problems and as it just so happens, she recently lost a most suitable suitor because of that. The family can barely afford to buy food but still, they soldier on, hoping for the best.

So when the young, attractive and rich Lord Boring arrives in the neighbourhood with a party of at least another 4 marriageable young men, the Crawleys go into overdrive in preparations for the upcoming season of balls and hunts. And at first, everything seems to be going really well for Althea and Lord Boring and a proposal is expected at any given time. But then why is he spending so much time with Althea's stepsister Charity (the one with the money) and why does the insufferable Mr. Fredericks keep getting in the way and arguing so much with Althea?

Keeping the Castle is a mixed bag>. Parts of it are brilliantly funny and the book can be read easily in one go – it is short, sweet and romantic. The best thing about is Althea's voice. At times extremely observant especially when it comes to the roles women play and the utterly unfair of men's expectations toward women. For example when she makes this observation about one of her suitors:

*I keep forgetting how ridiculously sensitive and illogical men were. He assumed that his fortune would buy a beauty; I assumed that my beauty would procure me a rich husband. It seemed much the same thing to me, but evidently what was permissible in a man was not in a woman.*

But at other times, she could also be frustratingly oblivious especially when it came to Mr. Fredericks. I adored her competence at taking care of her house and family and her loyalty and dedication to them and to her friends.

That said...it is a truth generally accepted that I can and will enjoy a familiar premise and unoriginal tropes if a story truly shines through it. Unfortunately, Keeping the Castle despite its great main character wasn't anywhere good enough to make me forget how utterly conventional of a Regency it was.

Everything about the story was predictable and recognisable – all storylines followed an established pattern, very similar to Jane Austen's, Georgette Heyer's and many a Historical Romance novels. The secondary characters are all stock Regency characters (the mother, the stepsisters, the villains, the hero) without any real depth. Althea and Mr Frederick's dynamics and bickering very much the standard for this type of novel (and resembling Lizzie Bennet and Mr Darcy's so much).

Although parts of it were admittedly delightful and if I am being honest, I did finish it with a smile on my face, *Keeping the Castle* is a book that plays it really, really safe and travels on extremely familiar routes. Sometimes the familiar is enough to offer comfort – and there is nothing wrong about that. But sometimes the familiar is just that: ordinary, conventional, mundane. Unfortunately this one fell into the latter type of familiar for me.

I don't really have a lot more to say about it. I have mostly forgotten about it (even though I finished it two days ago). I do wonder: for those readers that haven't read as many Regencies as I have, this could prove to be a complete delight. Because I did find sufficient things to enjoy (like Althea's voice and the prose) and since I heard her other books are absolutely fabulous I went ahead and got me a copy of *Lost in the Labyrinth*. Let's see if I can still become a fan of Patrice Kindl. Fingers crossed.

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### **writer... says**

At Last - Jane Austen fan Fun for AUGUST with annual #AustenInAugust #bookstagram challenge with daily prompts, author visits, giveaways, JAFF, and book talk..

This novel being my 1st read and total enjoyment. Complexity of plotting our heroine devises in her effort to save their seaside castle, provision for family futures, and a worthy husband capable to take over future provision! An EMMA like delight.

You're invited!

Join us daily or as you're able ...

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### **K.A. Barson says**

I dare you to read the first page and not laugh out loud. If you like Jane Austen and *Downton Abbey*, you'll love this book. The surface story is about a cheeky young English girl in the 19th century who wants to secure her position (and her castle home) by finding a proper husband. The problem is that she too often says what she thinks, and even though she is beautiful, she scares away the few prospects her little village in Yorkshire has. Sounds like other stories, doesn't it? Well, don't be fooled by the surface. What lies underneath is humor, some subtle and some not-so-subtle, and a few twists along the way. The twists are inevitable, but not predictable, just the way twists should be. Overall, it's a fun read what will have you speaking with an affected 19th century British accent by the end. Or maybe that's just me.

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### **Jennifer Bellridge says**

This book is not going to keep you up at night, nor is it going to change your life. It won't make you think

deep thoughts, or make you laugh out loud on every page. It probably won't make you cry either. If it does, well, I find chocolate always helps that.

There are a lot of things this book is not. Kindl isn't trying to be the next Jane Austen, and to say that this is a blatant ripoff (as I have seen in other reviews) is quite unfair. Keeping the Castle should be, in my opinion, viewed as a light satire. Our heroine Althea is pretty, and she knows it. She's opinionated, and she doesn't pretend to be otherwise. She's out to make a match for money, and she's doesn't hide that from many people, especially the reader. Our hero is brash, he has horrible manners, and he bloody well knows that too. :) There are evil stepsisters, for heaven's sake, and a lovable canine companion!

You know how the story will end. At just over 200 (small format) pages, it's hard to write in much of a complicated plot. However, I don't feel like I wasted a second of those few hours I sat down to read the book. It was thoroughly enjoyable, the kind of thing you read by the fire with a nice cuppa. It may be light and fluffy, but it's the kind of light fluff that keeps the pace moving, never gets boring, and holds your attention until the end.

In short, it's a very well written story. If you need a break between those 500 page behemoths on your "to be read" list, I would highly recommend it.

Just don't try to make it something it's not :)

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### **Miriam says**

Fluff. Unsympathetic fluff, at that. I did not like Anthea, our "heroine" or care about her "plight" of not having enough money to support the desired lifestyle of the elite and having to get by with just her beauty, fancy house, loyal servants, and supportive mother.

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### **Jen (The Starry-Eyed Revue) says**

An unexpectedly charming novel, but it definitely could've been longer to flesh out the characters and develop the relationships further. It definitely had the Jane Austen flair I've favored of late, drawing from both *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* with Althea's efforts to match-make and her antagonistic relationship with one Mr. Fredericks. This book was a delight, and though it doesn't number among my favorite Austen reimaginings, it definitely aided in pulling me out of my reading slump.

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### **The Captain says**

Ahoy there me mateys! As usual the beautiful cover drew me in.

The blurb on the cover is "Will she marry for love, money - or both?" Well that piqued me interest. When I read the blurb, I realized it sounded like a take on Jane Austen's novels with some silly twists. Turns out it is a pride and prejudice retelling! I was in the mood for something light and as Jane Austen just turned 241 years old, it seemed appropriate.



I had such a good time with this one. It takes place in a small English town called Lesser Hoo. The main character is a 17 year old named Althea. She lives in a castle-by-the-sea that is literally falling apart. With no dowry and only her wits (and thankfully looks) to go on, she must marry rich for the sake of her brother and mother's future prospects.

This is not a deep book but a fun somewhat ironic one at parts. If ye are looking for a novel that mimics Austen's style of writing and societal commentary then this might not float yer boat. But if ye want a quick tale with an Austen flavor then give it a try.

Apparently there is a second book in the series called a school for brides: a story of maidens, mystery, and matrimony. Sign me up!

To see me other reviews visit [https://thecaptainsquartersblog.wordpress...](https://thecaptainsquartersblog.wordpress.com)

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## Hallie says

That two stars may seem, or even *be* a bit mean, but I'd have been more lenient had the book not aimed so high intertextually. I haven't read *I Capture the Castle* for a while, so am not totally sure how I'd rate it now, but I certainly remember the voice, which is wonderful. Even a good chunk of the people who dislike the book do it for other reasons, I'd guess. I found the voice here anything but captivating, and struggled for a bit until I came up with the word that best summed it up for me: coy. I *hate* coy.

And of course the second set of intertextual works is Jane Austen's. I'm not a real snob about Austen redos, pastiches or what-have-yous - *Clueless* is one of my favourite films, and I've enjoyed a few YAs that have based themselves on Austen novels in one way or another. All right, all right, I probably *am* an Austen snob. But one thing about *Keeping the Castle* ensured that that snobbery came rising up and overwhelmed me while reading. That was the romance, which took superficial elements of various Austen romances and mashed them together, without the core morality those novels contain. I know this sounds very stuffy, but I will argue with anyone who wants to deny that all Jane Austen's novels have that solid moral core (more or less hidden in the humour) until the cows come home. Or ears bleed from listening, whichever comes first.

Althea and the romantic hero (to avoid spoilers, though really, it's not necessary) weren't Elizabeth and Mr Darcy, although she misjudged him in a very obvious way. Althea wasn't Catherine Morland, though that silliness was present (and he *\*definitely\** wasn't Henry Tilney!), and there was none of the clear-eyed social commentary which surrounds the somewhat icky romance in *Emma*. Frankly, the nearest to an Austen character Althea came in her motivation, if not her behaviour (or looks), was Charlotte in P&P, and that's not a good thing.

All in all, I found this a major disappointment, which didn't offer anything much by way of compensation.

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## Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

Althea Crawley is on a mission, a mission to marry money. It is the only thing that will save her family from ruin and save Crawley Castle - or "Crooked Castle" as it's affectionately dubbed - from falling into its own kind of ruin. Whimsically and stupidly built at the edge of a cliff above the North Sea by Althea's great-

grandfather, it is impractical, draughty, cold, leaky, uncomfortable and downright ridiculous; but it is her little brother's inheritance and the only thing left to the family aside from a few little tenanted farms.

And Althea has the looks to succeed at her plan, too. Noted as the most beautiful woman in Yorkshire, at seventeen years old she has no competition. The only trouble is that she has a tendency to say the wrong thing, and speak her thoughts out loud, which does tend to scare off the young men asking for her hand.

And time is running out for Crooked Castle. Mould grows on the damp walls, there are some serious leaks in the roof, and they have barely enough to eat. It doesn't help that, in an attempt to revive their fortunes after the death of Althea's father, her mother remarried a man of means who, already ill on their wedding day, died not long after and left everything to his two mature, unmarried daughters, Prudence and Charity: now Prudence and Charity live at Crooked Castle, adding to the burden but rarely ever contributing to the castle's upkeep or the food in the larder. On occasion, Althea resorts to clever subterfuge to get them to loosen their purse-strings, but considering how insufferable the sisters are about giving up any of their fortune, it's rarely worth the effort.

But there's a bright light on the horizon, in the form of a new neighbour. Lord Boring has recently inherited his title from his old uncle who lived alone at nearby Gudgeon Park, which had fallen into a state of unloved grubbiness, and moved in with his mother and his aunt, a woman who had married a tradesman out of love. He comes with a party of other well-to-do people, as well as his cousin, Mr Fredericks.

Althea sets out at once to win Lord Boring, but so does her cousin Charity - though surely Lord Boring is too refined in his taste to fall for *her*! Her goal is further confounded by the presence of Mr Fredericks, who between damaging parts of Crawley Castle as he inspected it with a disparaging eye, and being all too free with his often cynical opinions, Althea feels herself becoming quite vexed with the man. Add to that the arrival of a rich young woman, Miss Vincy, whose parents are determined to marry her to Lord Boring, and Althea feels the need to concoct a new plan: marry Miss Vincy to Mr Fredericks, and then the field will be clear for her and Lord Boring! If only Althea could see things as clearly as she speaks them!

This was a very fun, light-hearted quick little novel, very much inspired by both *Pride and Prejudice* and, perhaps even more so, *Emma*. In fact, Althea is quite the Emma. It's not really a "regency romance", not in the Harlequin sense at least; it is romance in the Jane Austen sense: two people, plus supporting cast, who should be together, readers can see that they'll end up together, but they take their time figuring that out and have plenty of misunderstandings along the way. It's worked before and it works here, although it has a by-the-numbers feel to it at times. I would have liked it even more if it had been set a bit later than the Regency period; at first I thought it was early Victorian, and with the dilapidated castle as a backdrop, perched precariously at the edge of a cliff, the added atmosphere would have gone down really well.

Althea was a lively, intelligent but strangely unperceptive heroine (all the "plot twists" are readily apparent to us readers; I doubt they're meant as real twists, with such hefty clues left lying around). She's very much like Emma. What quickly becomes apparent to us readers she doesn't figure out for ages. That made her a bit frustrating, though there's nothing inherently contradictory about an intelligent but unperceptive person. She's well meaning, and I've never liked well meaning people: they tend to do more harm than good, and their good intentions tend to have selfish origins, plus being well meaning is a non-excuse for meddling and upsetting others. I always hate it when, after someone is hurt by someone else, you are told "Yes but she *means* well." As if that should excuse it. All "well meaning" people need a Mr Knightley to come along and hold a mirror up now and again.

In *Keeping the Castle*, such a role should go to Mr Fredericks, but he's his own character and doesn't meddle

in anything. I loved Mr Fredericks (I've forgotten his first name just now), he's so blunt and honest and outspoken, and gets away with it in that way men could when women couldn't. Watching him criticise the castle on his first tour, damaging everything he touches, was funny but I also felt for Althea, felt protective of the castle and in that instant wanted what she wanted: to save it.

*Keeping the Castle* is a comic, character-driven story, wherein the characters may be familiar and ones you've read before in some form, but are given fresh life here. Between the small adventures, misadventures, buffoon-like characters and lively banter between Althea and Mr Fredericks, it's highly entertaining. I would have loved it to be a bit longer, a bit more in-depth, and to spend a bit more time building tension and chemistry between Althea and Mr Fredericks, but that's not to say it doesn't have that: again, it's more Austen-esque, but even P&P had an incredible, slow-burning sexual anticipation that really made the story simmer with tension.

If you're looking for a quick, funny read, especially in the summer, definitely pick up *Keeping the Castle*. It might not have a deep, lasting impression on you, but like the best kind of cake, it's very enjoyable while it lasts.

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### Rebecca says

Seventeen-year-old Althea Crawley, the heroine of *Keeping the Castle*, is in quite a bind. The family estate of Crawley Castle is quite literally falling apart. There is no money to repair it - Althea's father died, leaving the family nothing, and when her mother later married a rich man, he died just a few weeks later, before he could help repair the castle, and leaving two more mouths to feed - Prudence and Charity, Althea's wicked stepsisters. If there is to be anything left of the castle for Althea's little brother, Alexander, to inherit, Althea must marry a rich man who will help her family. Unfortunately, there aren't very many rich, eligible young men in the small Yorkshire town of Lesser Hoo - until their new neighbor, Lord Boring, moves in.

The new Lord Boring is young and handsome and has inherited his uncle's title and home. As soon as she meets him, Althea becomes certain she must persuade him to marry her. After all, he's rich and handsome - the perfect husband! And Althea is young and beautiful, so surely she would make the perfect wife for him. But Althea's stepsister Charity has also taken an interest in Lord Boring, while the very rude Mr. Fredericks, Lord Boring's estate manager and cousin, always seems to be around to cause trouble.

*Keeping the Castle* is a delightful parody of the traditional Regency romance. It's cute, hilarious, and just so much fun to read. Most young adult books are very dark and can be depressing at times, and although I enjoy many of the "dark" books, it's also nice to read something that's light and fluffy from time to time. And *Keeping the Castle* fits that description perfectly. If you are looking for a light, charming, historical read, then I highly recommend *Keeping the Castle*.

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### Wendy says

It took me a very long time to warm to this book--fully half the book, I think. But once I got there, I warmed to it thoroughly and relished every delightful bit. I'm not a particular Jane Austen devotee, but this was enough *Downton Abbey* to satisfy (though a different era). The heroine was thoroughly unlikeable at first,

but once she makes a female friend she becomes endearing--and I love that it's that making the difference. I could see where the plot was going immediately, but didn't quite know how it would get there, which was satisfying.

(ETA: snort. Let me add that every two star review here, and probably many of the threes but I didn't read them, misses the point completely; does not understand the light parody at play.)

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## **Clare Cannon says**

A brief but entertaining Austenian story about a quick-witted heroine, a not too sensible mother, two selfish step-sisters and the dilapidated castle in which they live. And, of course, the men they wish to marry.

While the backbone of the story is solid (along the theme of heart vs money) and the tone is witty and light, the novel is too short for any real development, making it a quick and satisfactory but not especially involved read. Most characters remain flat and stereotypical, perhaps with the exception of the central two. Yet even these are not explored in great depth, which will disappoint true Austen devotees. These may, however, enjoy the story as an entertaining interlude. [www.GoodReadingGuide.com](http://www.GoodReadingGuide.com)

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## **Emily May says**

It's as if I've been on a constant downer lately, I even manage to find bad stuff to say about books I really enjoyed and I'm starting to wonder if the problem is my own. That's why I'm being unusually generous and giving a book that never really grabbed me and one I struggled to finish three stars. Not because I've just decided to change what I personally require for my ratings, but because I wonder if some of my inability to appreciate the humour and attempts at subtle irony in this book are because of my current mood and a few other reasons I'll go on to discuss.

For a start, this book is set in nineteenth century Yorkshire with some walks on the moors and comments on places that left me feeling somewhat nostalgic. I would appreciate it if someone could comment and tell me whether we are told anywhere near the beginning that this was nineteenth century? I spent three quarters of the book trying to work it out, it seemed like the most obvious choice of time period for such a novel but I didn't notice a mention of it until nearly the end of the book. But it is quite possible that I was being extremely dense once again. Anyway, the author won some immediate brownie points with me for setting the story in my home county.

I think if ratings were on intention, this novel would easily get five stars from me. It's a book that I should absolutely love in theory: the setting, the Austen-style mockery of gender relations, the humour (because parts are very funny, the first page is one such part)... but I don't think the author succeeded. It took me a while to realise her novel was anything more than a piece of fluff with Cinderella-style balls, descriptions of beautiful women and their dresses, and bitchiness. This is the first modern day book I've read that tries to do irony like Austen, and not only was I not expecting it, I don't think it quite worked. Well, not for me anyway.

I wonder if making fun of nineteenth century ways holds as much charm when a modern writer does it?

Austen's excellent writing aside, she was a master of irony - in fact, it has been suggested that irony was the shield behind which she expressed her radical ideas. When I read Austen, I find myself constantly smiling at this lady's brilliance, that she saw her society for what it truly was: a bunch of actors trying to adhere to a ridiculous set of unwritten rules in order to be deemed proper and refined. But she saw it when not so many people did. Nowadays, it is of common opinion that nineteenth century behaviour was quite silly, it's not really groundbreaking for the author to poke fun at it. This is one possibility why the novel failed for me.

Also, I think Kindl focuses too much on humour and loses her characters and plot to it. I didn't care for the MC - Althea, or her mother, or what happened with Lord Boring, or what happened with Mr Fredericks. I didn't care. There's some seemingly pointless dawdling in the middle which is there so the author can maneuver the characters into a particular situation that will allow her to ironically explore gender relations. And perhaps I am just not educated enough in the ways of nineteenth century women but I find it hard to believe any of them had the kind of pro-feminist outburst that Althea has at one point. She basically stomps her foot and screams about how women are people too and deserving of respect, and then she screams about how they are not property (even though they are). I was confused by this, as much as I love the idea of a Victorian woman giving her patriarchal society the middle finger, these claims were rare in the 1950s - never mind the nineteenth century, right? Unless, of course, this was irony on top of irony... damn, my head hurts.

When I realised what Kindl was trying to achieve with this novel, I suddenly liked it a whole lot more. But the exaggerated characters which are supposed to make us laugh at the stupidity of how people behaved two hundred years ago are easily mistaken for another fluffy cheesefest. Now I believe that the author's choice of having a beautiful protagonist with two ugly stepsisters was probably all part of her ironic package. I think she was showing how shallow society was. I think.

And another reason I gave this three stars instead of two is because part of me wonders if this author is not at fault, but rather many others before her are. Let me explain. Even though Kindl creates exaggerated and ridiculous characters, I took forever to work out that she was being ironic. Thankfully, I'm not just completely stupid because other reviews of this book describe it as a fluffy and mindless read. However, I wonder if myself and others didn't get the joke because there are actually novels with characters just like this that are not being ironic. That put importance on beauty and dresses and they actually mean it. Like Gossip Girl and (as I've heard) The Luxe.

Perhaps if you pick up this book after reading my review, you will enjoy it more because you know what's going on from the beginning. Or perhaps you're just smarter and more astute than I am. I hope so, I really do, I like what Kindl was trying to do here even if it didn't work so much for me.

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