



## Unveiled

*Courtney Milan*

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Of all Ash Turner's accomplishments, stealing a dukedom from his old enemy is by far the most brazen. Now that he's been recognized as the heir, nothing remains but to head to Parford Manor and survey the estate that will be his. He expects opposition.

He gets Lady Margaret.

Margaret lost everything when Ash claimed the dukedom: her dowry, her legitimacy, and her place in society. Now Ash wants to take her family home, too. She disguises herself as a nurse, determined to learn his weaknesses. But the closer she comes to Ash, the greater the pull of his reckless charm. If she wants to reclaim what she has lost, her only choice is to betray the man she is beginning to love...

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## Unveiled Details

Date : Published July 7th 2014 by Entangled: Edge (first published January 25th 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Courtney Milan

Format : Kindle Edition 381 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Historical Fiction

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## From Reader Review Unveiled for online ebook

### Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

**Bless you, Courtney Milan, master of historical romance, for giving me this gift of a book. Holy crap, you are one talented lady.**

I'm obsessed with everything Courtney Milan, and I'm beyond excited to have a new-to-me series from her to explore. I've loved every book by this author that I've ever read, and this book was no different. It was **clever, sexy, smart, and impeccably written**. Courtney Milan needs to teach a class so she can SCHOOL all the historical romance authors who try, and fail, to measure up.

The story isn't complicated, but the characters are. Ash Turner is a man who is **determined**. Determined to do right by his brothers, determined to win a dukedom, and determined to get revenge on those who have wronged him. Ash Turner is also a man who **knows what he wants**, and from the minute he laid eyes on Margaret, he knew he had to have her.

Margaret is trying to **survive**. Everything has been stripped from her but she remains **loyal, strong, and unflinching**. She hates Ash Turner on sight for what he has taken from her, but slowly, as they get to know one another, their relationship evolves and Margaret can't ignore him any longer.

I was **absolutely obsessed** with this romance. Just obsessed. This is a slow-burn romance, despite the instant attraction, and I could not get enough of Ash and Margaret together. **Their relationship was the stuff that makes me inspired to read romance**. They had an epic, hard-fought romance that worked despite everything that had transpired between them.

I loved Ash in particular. He was a man who stood by his word and the ones that he loved, and I just adored everything about him. He wasn't without flaws, but he was crafted so well as a character that I loved every last imperfection about him. I think Margaret was a great character too, but I grew a tiny bit frustrated with her in the last portion of the book, which actually just narrowly bumped this book from making my all-time favorites list... but it was close. This book is honestly **perfection**.

The sex scenes... gah! Courtney Milan always gives her stories the *exactly correct* level of heat. This book was a celebration of all the sex could be. Perfection.

I'll mention a little about the narration, which was very good. Rebecca De Leeuw did a great job narrating this story, especially with her range of vocal differentiation and her nicely done male voices. Very, very easy to listen to, and Rebecca De Leeuw made me just want to listen more and more. **Lovely**.

Courtney Milan, I don't know how you do it, but you are just in the *zone* for me. I loved the length of this story, the content, and the plot line. I literally cannot wait to start the next in the series. In fact, I'm off to buy it now.

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## **Ally says**

Making this short but Unveiled reminds me why I love historical romance. Ash is simply the best, most amazing hero. Never have I wanted a character in a book to be as real as this one. Tender, patient, some decent alpha. Just plain excellent.

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## **Rane says**

When I sit down with a Courtney Milan book it's like I'm in for a seven-course meal, with a deep romance, drama, humor, angst, an excellent plot and two amazing leads. Milan expands and weaves her novel to just pull the reader deeply into the story and lives of her characters that leaves you wanting to reach the end and at the same time never wanting it to end.

Ash Turner has long overdue payback on his mind, and with his plan brought into motion, he's out to finally take claim after the suffering he and his family have gone through by the hands of the Duke of Parford, a long relation cousin. Ash proves to the courts the Duke is a bigamist, whom marry in haste his mistress and never had the marriage annulled. Now his children of he had from his second "marriage" are considered illegitimate and are unable to inherit, but that leaves Ash the new heir to become the next Duke of Parford.

Of course the Duke's illegitimate children are going to take this laying down. After losing everything from their titles to their so called "friends" they out to prove Ash is unfit to take over the title of Duke. As the two sons of the Duke ready themselves for the upcoming battle in Parliament to have their bill overturned, their sister Margaret Dalrymple stays behind at the Parford Manor in order to nurse her sick father and play the spy to find any dirt on Ash.

From their first meeting a spark goes off between the two, with Ash determined to win Margaret for himself and Margaret trying to hold on to the hate she has for the man whom ruined her and her family's lives, as both begin to know one another secrets that could harm either of them, only bind them closer together as they both reach a conclusion either of them expected to face.

My first impression of this book went quickly out the window by just the first few pages. Many of my impression and what I thought this book would be about quickly follow suit out the window. As I was pulled into this book. Instead of having to deal with a man whom would ruin lives of others to get his way, bent on payback at any cost, we're given an amazing character of Ash whom is honorable, funny, and determined to help and care for his remaining family who holds a few harsh and sad secrets close to his heart, but doesn't let that stop him from making something of himself. Ash won me over by his so called "cheerfully ruthlessness" Ash never acts what you would think or come to think a hero would act like. He was always clear about what he wanted and was driven to see it through. Ash easily won and broke my heart when it's reviled about his secret that even his own brothers didn't know about. Ash feels a great guilt after he left his bothers Mark and Smite to make his fortune, and later his brother prove to him that their going to stand behind him through thick and thin - this is a driving force behind much of his actions and later by the instinct that drives him is also makes him see things from a different POV,

Margaret also threw out any impression I might have had of her, instead of being bitter, she was more hurt by the actions of her father and the pain caused her beloved mother. Margaret also surprises everyone by her actions, when she learns of Ash secret, instead of selling him out, she sets out to help him even at the cost

of trying to win the bill. Margaret in many ways wants to play fair and prove she and her brothers can regain what they lost. Margaret believes in honor even more so than her so-called family. Sometimes I wanted to shake her to open her eyes but in the end she loved her family and that made her a stronger character in my eyes, even when things turn against her, she fights the tide to do what she feels in her heart is the right thing and be with Ash.

The dramatic between Margaret and Ash were always at a sort of balance with their odds always coming out even. Their relationship was so time and true with nothing being assumed. Margaret and Ash's grow and become the strength both later rely on to pull them through the trouble times they must face.

The beauty of the story is CM never once went back to some time and true plot seen time and again in other books, she always held this reader spellbound with her twists and surprises that made this book truly magical and original.

Courtney Milan did it again with her amazing writing ability and *Unveiled* just made me a happy romance reader, through and through. I look eagerly forward to Ash's brothers' stories with Mark believing greatly in chastity and Smite being a genius in his own right. *Unveiled* is beautiful romance that everyone should pick up and lose themselves in.

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### **Baba says**

**"I can't read books," he whispered, "but I have other skills. An instinct, if you will--this ability to know things, people, in the blink of an eye. It's how I made my fortune. It's how I knew, when I first saw you..." He trailed off, and reached out and deliberately ran a finger down her arm. "I knew I could trust you," he explained. "Instantly. Irrevocably."**

It's beautiful. It's witty. It's charming. But above and beyond...it's incredibly intimate and I adored the subtleties.

*"I want you to paint your own canvas. I want you to unveil yourself."*

**Ah, yessss, this is HR (emphasis on romance) at its best! Ms. Milan swept me off my feet again, and I think this is the moment to roll out the red carpet.** You sure know how to plot an eclectic, adorable and charming HR! Kudos, Ms. Milan. *Unveiled* is my favorite book in the *Un* series.

### **Somerset, August 1837**

*Unveiled* starts off with Ash Turner, the future Duke of Parford, exploring the estate that he will inherit quite soon. He's come to take over Parford Manor. When Ash meets the servants, one particular woman strikes his eye. Anna Margaret Dalrymple (Margaret Lowell). Richard, the Duke of Parford, is dying and Margaret pretends to be the old duke's nurse. Ash doesn't know that Margaret is in fact Lady Anna and Richard's daughter. She keeps her real identity a secret since her brothers have left her on Parford lands to spy upon Ash. She has to report Ash's comings and goings to her brothers.

*Margaret.* Over the past months, she'd had everything stripped from her: her name, when it was discovered that Lady Anna Margaret Dalrymple was a bastard. Her dowry, when Chancery decided that as illegitimate offspring, she wasn't entitled to the funds settled upon her mother. Margaret is very sad and still grieving

over the loss of her mother. She looks upon Ash with disdain and cold disgust. Margaret is such an intelligent, protective, fierce and loyal woman. She cares for those she loves. But at the same time Margaret was a mystery, and Ash intended to unravel every delicious clue, until he'd stripped her naked. In every sense of the word.

*Ash.* Margaret had never met a man like Ash. He stood so far outside her experience. Ash seduced Margaret with the promise of her own self; that she would be important again. At the same time it's not only about seduction--it's much more. Ash wants Margaret to choose him because he decided upon her a while ago. I loved Ash. He is handsome and sinfully hot, yet at the same time he is such a caring and kind-hearted man. On top of that, I adored his vulnerability. Ultimately, he will do anything for his Margaret. He cares for those he loves and he protects them with a fierceness that speaks for itself. Yes, Ash, you are truly magnificent!

Ash is a very successful businessman. He is dyslexic. Ash said:

*"I just can't understand words when they're written down. They feel slippery in my mind. Now, if someone were to have a conversation with me about any subject, I could follow along, and gladly. And, for some reason, numbers have never posed a problem. I can figure. But I can never understand the back-and-forth of negotiations if I cannot look a man in the eyes. That's what I need."*

Their dialogue is exceptionally good (BTW, this is my very favorite part of the book):

*"I've lost count of the number of times your brother has made me laugh. Chastity is far more amusing than I had anticipated."*

*"Chastity," Ash said dryly, "is far more arousing than I had anticipated."*

*(...) "I do believe we are straying into the improper," she said.*

*"Oh, no," he contradicted. "We aren't straying. I had hoped we had embarked on a deliberate journey."*

*(...) "A voyage?" she asked, her voice shaky. "But...but we can have no mutual destination."*

*Clearly she'd not realized they'd left the docks behind days before. "It's not about where we go, but how we arrive." Slowly. At great length, savoring every last inch of her skin.*

As always I absolutely adored the profound, rich and witty dialogue! I have not enough words to explain it properly. I was so enthralled by their interaction and I loved to witness their *glorious, wicked, unchaste tumble headlong into sin*. Further, the characters are so prime, very likable and believable. Oh, Ash, you are very memorable indeed. The build-up was incredibly well done and I said it before: I adored all those subtleties. There's this all-encompassing intimacy throughout the whole story--it almost undid me. Admittedly, the heat level in Ms. Milan's books is not high but her love scenes are really lovely nonetheless. **She doesn't write these scenes for the sake of sex. The love scenes are there because the timing is perfect and the level of tension has been exhausted.** *Unveiled* is another wonderfully penned historical romance by the very talented Ms. Milan.

*"You matter," she whispered to him. "You are important. And you are the single most magnificent man I have ever had the honor of meeting."*

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**TJ says**

4.5/5.0

Courtney Milan is quickly becoming an all-time favorite HR author for me and "Unveiled" is the perfect example as to why. The characters of Ash Turner and Lady Margaret are two of the most endearing, yet believable, honorable yet torn characters on page today. The story is engaging with twists and turns one *never* expects - especially the big one at the end! The only glitch for me was the "from the moment he saw her he knew he would seduce her" aspect.. it just didn't fit with his otherwise sigh-worthy, clutch the book and fan the face characterization. The type of man Ash was would *not* be so blasé' about ruining a young woman whether nurse or aristocrat. With that exception, this story is the stuff romance is made of and the reason people gobble it up!

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### **Kinga says**

This must be the only historical romance whose hero's great weakness is his extreme dyslexia.

It was fairly well-paced and hot but we ultimately didn't get along because of three themes existing in this novel, that I am not a fan of.

- 'From the first moment he knew she was the one': this meant to be and love from the first sight crap is just not for me. If you tell me on page one that he knew she was the one, then you don't have to really build your characters and their relationship with each other because their fate is sealed. God, I know it is a romance novel and they will overcome all and be together in the end, I get that but convince me why they should!

- Hero who loves his heroine unfailingly from the first to the last page, not once doubting himself or her. It's just boring. Give me hate, give me angst, give me indifference at least. I prefer when it's the heroine who needs to do the work to win the hero's heart because I have enough of men who are blindly in love with me in the real life, thank you very much.

- Heroine who needs her hero to validate her as a person. Now, I don't mind my heroine a little damaged, even completely broken in the area of romantic relationships but I want her to be strong and secure in all the other spheres of her life. I want her to need the guy just for love and not to basically make her into a person. This whole thing in 'Unveiled' where the hero tells the heroine that 'she matters, she is important' and it causes her some epiphany that yes, in fact she is a human being and not a doormat, rubbed me the wrong way. Also, I found her behaviour to be inconsistent with her supposed personality. (Given her doormat-like qualities she should make a great servant that she is pretending to be, yet even though everything depends on her playing that role this is the only time she decides to shows some signs of having some cojones which would totally blow her cover if the hero wasn't so daft /so much for his famed 'instincts' /)

All of this probably tells you more about me than about the book. I guess, I do like to have the same story told to me over and over again. I just couldn't fall in love with the hero. I found his seduction technique crass, he was just a creepy stalker really (but what to expect from a guy who from the first moment 'knew') and, I suppose, I prefer my men literate. However, I did enjoy the theme of loyalty conflict in 'Unveiled'.

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### **Sharon says**

Here are some of my thoughts:

- First impression of Ash: Cliché, arrogant, and shallow AF
- First impression of Margaret: Boring and also shallow
- By around 50%-70%, I can appreciate the character developments I see in these characters. They actually both turn out quite likable? Ash is so dedicated to his brothers and vulnerable in garnering their approval. I can even appreciate the confidence that we have seen since the beginning because he has shown why he is so determined in his life. In addition, Margaret has gotten more thoughtful and lively later on. I appreciate that she has shown how the struggles she has gone through in the past year has changed her, and how much her perspective has changed.
- I especially like that scene where she realizes that she no longer wants the approval of her fake friends. And same for that scene when she realizes that she deserves to give her loyalty to people who appreciates her and treats her well. I was dang proud when she finally got to that realization, but it took her like the whole book.
- The romance is whatever in the beginning, but as I start liking the characters better, especially seeing how they both have developed individually (but with each other's help), I start liking their dynamic a bit more. I like the way he challenges her and the way he always respects her. He is infinitely patient with her throughout the book. Especially towards the latter part of the book, he is honestly so sweet and respectful towards her. In addition, I like that she speaks up to him and truly listens and recognizes his good qualities. When she champions him to her brothers and actually scolds them, I'm so impressed by her care for him. The same goes for him because he also champions her to her brothers. It is nice to see that they are grateful for each other and accept each other, while their own family can fail to show that same level of family loyalty they are able to give.
- Speaking of family, I love the strong family theme. Ash's brothers in particular are amusing, and I can't wait to learn more about them in their own books.
- The last 20% gets a bit annoying and repetitive, but overall, I like the twist at the end and the conclusion.

Overall, **3 stars**. I like it. The developments in the characters are particularly shocking and great to me. However, I am not exactly enchanted at this point. This is my 1st Milan book, and I definitely see myself trying more of her books/series.

Things that you might want to know (WARNING: Spoilers below)

Happy/satisfying ending? (view spoiler)

Love triangle? Cheating? Angst level? Other things to note? (view spoiler)

Tears-worthy? (view spoiler)

Humor? (view spoiler)

Favorite scenes? (view spoiler)

What age level would be appropriate? (view spoiler)

**Elizabeth (Liz) says**

I do believe I'm missing the I-love-Courtney-Milan gene that everyone seems to have. I skimmed big portions of this story. It was deadly dull. Proficiently written, but *\*deadly\** dull.

**Dina says**

FAN-TAS-TIC!!! This was my first read by Ms. Milan and, wow, I was very impressed. I loved her writing, the story, the characters - everything.

Ash Turner, a wealthy man who's built his fortune in trade after enduring years of near poverty as a child, is finally close to avenging his sister's death and his brothers' suffering at the hands of the Dalrymples. After discovering that the head of the Dalrymple family, the Duke of Parford, married his mistress (in haste and in secret) when he was too young to know better and has never had that marriage annulled, Ash takes the case to the ecclesiastical courts, and thus has the duke's second marriage declared void for bigamy and the children resulting from that union declared illegitimate and unable to inherit. That leaves Ash, the duke's long-hated fifth cousin, twice removed, as the presumptive heir. And with the duke's current medical condition, it's only a matter of time before Ash becomes the new Duke of Parford.

The Dalrymple "children" (Richard, Edmund and Margaret) have lost almost everything - their titles, their honor, their "friends" and their mother - in less than a year, all thanks to Ash's uncovering of their father's bigamy. They haven't accepted defeat, though. So when they learn that Ash is moving to Parford Manor to oversee the estate he's about to inherit, Richard and Edmund move to London in preparation for the upcoming battle that will take place in Parliament when the lords debate the bill granting the Darlrymple family the remedy of legitimacy. Margaret stays with her father at Parford Manor, pretending to be a nurse so she can spy on Ash and document his failings, demonstrating that he's unfit to manage the estate and thus tilting the odds of her brothers' winning the debate in Parliament in their favor.

Margaret is predisposed to hate Ash on sight, but she soon finds out that it's impossible to not like him. There's just something about him. It isn't his looks, his money or, as she calls it, his *cheerful ruthlessness*. It's the way he makes people feel they matter regardless of who they are. And Ash makes Margaret feel she matters from the start, when he thinks she's a mere servant. As they spend more time together and she learns his secrets, understanding that there's more than simple revenge behind his actions, a bond of trust and intimacy (of souls, not bodies) is formed between them. Torn between that newfound bond and her loyalty to her brothers, Margaret tries to protect both, but she knows she'll have to sacrifice one to save the other in the end. The question is, which one will it be?

This book had me engaged from beginning to end. I loved both Ash and Margaret: I wanted to be her and marry him. The conflict in their relationship came from the situation they found themselves in, not from any dysfunctional trait they might have as characters - like fear of abandonment or commitment, for example. Family, honor, loyalty, betrayal and forgiveness were at the core of this story and Ms. Milan has done an excellent job weaving those elements into Ash and Margaret's relationship. I especially liked the way Ms. Milan hasn't fallen into clichés, avoiding some of the well-travelled paths in Romancelandia. Without giving away any spoilers, there was a much-anticipated scene where Ash's reaction caught me completely by surprise. A very pleasant surprise, I'm happy to say. I've read that scene - or the basics of it - in many books before and I was braced for what I "knew" it would happen. Well, I was kindly reminded that I "know" nothing. :)

I have to finish this review admitting that this book made me cry. I didn't want to, but I couldn't hold back the tears near the end of it. What can I say? That only happens when I'm really invested in a story, and Ms. Milan's beautiful writing had me enthralled from the first chapter to the epilogue.

### **Final verdict: It's a keeper!**

*Note: I received this eARC from Harlequin via NetGalley. That had **no** influence on my review/rating.*

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## Diana says

Since I didn't have much fun with this book and every review I've read takes it VERY SERIOUSLY, I may as well have fun with my comments. Random things that I did not buy or caused my brow to scrunch up, in no particular order.

- \* Ash is the poster boy for the **Fated Mate/Bonded Male/Destined Lover** who won't take no for an answer made famous by Stephanie Laurens and Christine Feehan. The oppressive, stalkery **FM/BM/DL** is unfortunately as common as mud in paranormals and only a few authors are getting it right. This is the reason I stopped reading Laurens.
- \* Margaret is the poster girl for the self-sacrificing, doormat sister who doesn't question that the responsibility to save her abusive father and selfish brothers is all hers. (Yes, they dump on her in the end - again - after all that futile selfless sacrificing.)
- \* So far these are characters straight out of the romance novel central casting office.
- \* Ash stalks Margaret, believing she is a servant. Margaret fends off Ash's advances in the snotty way of 19th century noble ladies because she is, duh, a noble lady masquerading as a servant. Ash, whom we are told ad nauseum has *instincts*, never questions a servant's giving him lip. She keeps forgetting to stay in character.
- \* Ash's younger Oxford educated brother says, "Don't do anything I wouldn't do." In 1836.
- \* When I felt that it was time to wrap this thing up Kindle told me I was 75% finished. At this point, the lovers separate, all hope is lost and we are thrown into page after page after page to wrap up that pesky inheritance/bastardization situation during which time the lovers are APART. Skim, skim, skim.
- \* The prose is fine, some of it lovely even. I felt as if the well-crafted sentence took precedence over the emotion the author was describing. This was my takeaway. Lyrically *described* passion and I didn't *feel* a damn thing. When I'm pulled out of the story to admire a nice simile or poetic metaphor, well, I'm pulled out of the story.

This book has gotten such positive buzz. Odd woman out here. I tried to enjoy it as if it were the Great American Romance Novel. For all the "original" and "different" promised, I found a cache of cliches.

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## UniquelyMoi ~ BlithelyBookish says

*And ye shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet. - Malachi 4:3.*

As much as he hates the name he was given by his religiously overzealous mother, Mr. Ash Turner has every intention of living up to it. He has spent the better part of his life watching, waiting for his chance to mete out revenge on his bitter enemy, the Duke of Palford. Now that the means have been laid at his feet, he'll stop at nothing to see justice served. But will revenge be as sweet as he had always imagined it would be? The answer might just surprise him.

Lady Anna Margaret Dalrymple has found herself in a most unfortunate situation. Until recently, she was the daughter of a duke – the Duke of Palford – and enjoyed a life of comfort meant only for upper society. But now, evidence has come out proving that her father is a bigamist and that she and her brothers are bastards.

And if that weren't bad enough, with her father dying and no legitimate heirs to inherit the title, a distant cousin has decided to lay claim to the dukedom and that distant cousin is Ash Turner. Now it's up to Lady Anna to help her brothers fight Mr. Turner's claim by digging up anything she can on him that will prove him unfit to hold the title.

Ash Turner is the kind of hero I can honestly say I'd be attracted to outside the pages of a romance novel, which took me by surprise. Truly, how could I possibly come to care about someone who was willing to ruin the lives of innocents just to better the lives of himself and his brothers? Well, Ms. Milan pulled it off with skill and in doing so has given me another perfectly matched pair to add to my list of Top Ten Couples. Ash might be ruthless, but much to Lady Anna's chagrin, he's also honorable, kind, generous and fiercely loyal to those he loves. And he has a secret shame that no one, not even his brothers, know about, and one that had me in tears because for all his ruthlessness, he was so very vulnerable.

Lady Anna is such a wonderful character! She has a strength about her that we don't often find in historical romance heroines. She's willing to do whatever she has to do to protect her family, but when she gets to know Ash better, to see him for the man he truly is and not just the man he allows others to see, will she be able to follow through with her plan and betray him, using the knowledge he's entrusted to her against him?

Throughout the story I was kept guessing as to how their differences could possibly be resolved allowing for both of their happiness, and in the end, I was very pleased with how things worked out, especially since it wasn't something I had seen coming!

With *Unveiled*, Courtney Milan has given us a moving, romantic, passionate and sexy story. It's a tale of deception, bitterness and loneliness, but it's also a beautiful story about compassion, forgiveness and, under the most difficult of circumstances, finding that one person who loves you for everything you are and everything you are not. The person who is destined to give you the kind of *happily ever after* you didn't believe existed.

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### **KatLynne says**

This is my second book by Courtney Milan and I really enjoyed this story. This author has a definite talent and I love how she incorporates the unusual in her stories and makes it work so well.

I loved the hero, Ash Turner. He is one of those men just oozing with that sizzling sex appeal that draws you in making you love him. But my love for him was not just his charismatic appeal. I liked his character ...he is strong, intelligent, honorable, resilient and protective of those he loves. And while hiding a long held secret we see a vulnerable side that appealed to me. Still suffering from painful events from his childhood, he is haunted by memories and relentlessly seeks revenge from the one man who hurt his family.

Lady Anna Margaret Dalrymple is the kind of heroine I like...intelligent, strong and fierce in her loyalty to those she loves. You can count on her to do what's right, even if it causes her much pain and heartache. Caught in the web of her father's lies and Ash's revenge, I admired her strength amidst so much personal pain and despair.

But I do not wish to convey that this story is all about hatred, revenge and despair. This is an amazing story full of passion, tenderness, strong sensual desire, longing, and hope. And as this story unveiled their deepest

desires and fears, I found myself saying, “well done” Courtney Milan for another wonderful romance.

\*\*\*\*\*Spoiler Alert\*\*\*\*\*

One of my favorite quotes

(view spoiler)

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### **Mimi Smith says**

#### **5 stars**

*“They want a woman who is a canvas, white and empty. Standing still, existing for no other purpose than to serve as a mute object onto which they can paint their own hopes and desires. They want their brides veiled. They want a demure, blank space they can fill with whatever they desire.”*

*“Miss Lowell, you magnificent creature, I want you to paint your own canvas. I want you to unveil yourself.”*

Wow! This book was much more captivating than I'd thought it would be. I loved it! So many thanks to my sister, Ana, for recommending Courtney Milan(many, MANY times) and to Anna and Erika, with whom I'm doing this buddy read. So, people, prepare yourself. Quotes overload!

Ash Turner has had a difficult life-made all the harder by the Dalrymples-the duke and his sons. But he's made it, he's now a successful businessman and a rich man, if not an educated one. And now he has the chance to take his revenge on them-as well as help his beloved brothers Mark and Smite in one move. Taking their dukedom away from them by proving their illegitimacy. Maybe it is cruel, but there are few things Ash wouldn't do for his brothers...

*“Yes,” he said, catching her look. “More of my cheerful ruthlessness, I’m afraid. And now you know my greatest weakness: my brothers. I want to give them everything. I want everyone in the world to realize how perfect they are. They are smarter than me, better than me. And I’ll do anything—cross anyone, steal anything, destroy whatever I must—to give them what they deserve.”*

*“Ash might as well have offered to send him to Jupiter for a brief visit. But then, if Mark had wanted to flap his wings and embark on a voyage to distant planets on holiday...*

*Well. Ash would have found a way.”*

Even though there's a certain distance between them and Ash feels left out...

*“I’m sorry I ever left. I’m sorry for whatever happened to you out there. I’m sorry there’s nothing between us to stitch together into even a pretense of friendship. I’m sorry, Smite.”*

So he arrives to Parford Manor, and there he sees *her* who he knows only as Margaret Lowell

*"He'd never seen the woman before in his life. He couldn't have; he would have remembered the feel of her, the sheer rightness of it. <...> Whatever it was, something about her resonated deep within him.*

*It reminded him of the cacophony of an orchestra as it tuned its instruments: dissonance, suddenly resolving into harmony. It was the rumble, not of thunder, but its low, rolling precursor, trembling on the horizon. It was all of that. It was none of that. It was sheer animal instinct, and it reached up and grabbed him by the throat. **Her. Her.**"*

And if there's something no one can deny about Ash, it's that he always follows his instincts:

*"A better phrase might have been that he possessed a sheer animal instinct. As if the reactive beast buried deep inside him could recognize truths that human intelligence, dulled by years of education, could not."*

And they are leading him to Margaret. And he is determined to win her over. It shouldn't be too difficult. After all, he is endlessly charming. Everyone loved him, right?

Margaret Lowell is actually Lady Anna Margaret, the daughter of the Duke of Parford. She remained in the manor to see what kind of man Ash was and to report it to her brothers, to help them in the fight for the title. But, slowly, Ash starts to win her over, despite her original protest. And he won her over by showing her all she is and could be. But first came flirting and teasing

*"I brown terribly in the sunlight. I'll develop freckles."*

*"Oh, no. That sounds awful." He spoke with exaggerated solicitude, but he leaned down from his horse until his nose was a bare foot from hers. "Freckles. And what do those dastardly spots portend? Are freckled people thrown in prison? Pilloried? Covered in tar and sprinkled with tiny little down feathers?"*

Then the encouragement:

*"So call me Ash," he said with a smile. "Call me Ash, not for me, but as a small defiance. Call me Ash because you deserve it. Because your station is just so many words in a parish register, not a sentence of death."*

And, finally, the love:

*"And then you looked at me and you told me I mattered. You didn't need theories or arguments to make me believe it. You just...looked. And you believed."*

*"I love that you make me feel as if I'm the only woman in the world. I love that you'll always be there for me." She sat up on the bed, and her petticoats fell, so that only her toes peeked out at him from underneath those layers of fabric. "I want to paint my own canvas, Ash. And I want you on it with me."*

There were problems, of course. The biggest being Margaret's real identity and the necessity to choose between her brothers and him.

*"He stared up at her, and then slowly, slowly, he gave her a brilliant grin—one that lit the darkest corners of her wary soul. He was all light, no darkness. It was Margaret herself who cast shadows."*

But when Ash wants something and feels something is right. He gets it. Always.

So, what else to say about this book. I obviously loved it. I liked its originality, the characters, both Ash and Margaret were great and so right for each other. I loved the brothers, too. Especially Mark. A Practical Guide To Chastity, indeed \*snort\*. I loved the humor and the romance. the whole damn thing. So, to everyone reading this review... No I did not post the entire novel here, and there's so much more. And you should consider-I'm not usually a fan of historical romance, so me saying that means a lot.

Oh, and the only thing I remained curious about-what's Ash's full name?

**ETA** Never mind the last bit, Erika told me (view spoiler) No, I'm not kidding.

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### **Elizabeth says**

I decided to give this book a try, my first ever Courtney Milan, having seen the praise lavished on both author and book gathering the momentum of an avalanche. Obviously, previous crushing disappointment has not yet taught me to mistrust this kind of 'enthusiasm' and see through all this thoroughly undeserved praise.

Everything in this book is so smugly mature, so insufferably idealised, so wishfully civilised, that you could both smell and feel the starch. The reader is assaulted by a narrative that reads like an endless relationship-guideline (wholly contemporary of course - why bother set your book in the 19th c.? Since the past plays no part in anything, why don't you bloody set it in the present and be done with it?) and the story itself is never allowed to breathe the fresh air of unruly desire, capture some of the pathos of the baseness of human need, or explore the interior of long nurtured dreams of revenge and the depth of injury that fed them. The manufactured maturity of this book drowned everything that could have been interesting in this story, and it was so oppressive that finishing it felt like fleeing a small musty smelling basement.

The very concept of maturity (of the book's characters and their love) ends up as a clunky caricature of the real thing, sabotaged by the writer's ever so precious, ever so prissy treatment of passion and of gender, social and sexual relations. This reader felt constantly hammered by etiquette.

One of the failures of this book is that it harks back to the bad old days, when passion was conveniently and prudishly divided into two steps: first, one achieves the kind of intimacy the committee of co-conspirators (publishers and comfort-zone readers) has approved, and second, hero and heroine have sex. This kind of false dichotomy passes for 'development' in the couple's relationship. In Milan's book the sex is even more of a task to read than all the other elements in her not-remotely-historical romance (the past, in which it is supposedly set, counts for shit). For sex here is oddly de-sexualised and reads more like a pedantic discourse on what should happen between bodies in the dark.

That said, it would not be fair to say that Milan's writing is bad (although it can be that too, for example, a good writer would have never allowed the scenes between the Turner brothers to run and run into four and five pages. Nothing of what was said or accomplished by such prolixity could not have been done in three paragraphs), but it definitely is, and in a way that makes it worse than bad, insufferable, as it is lead by a desire for hagiographic, wholly affirmative romance, where even the having of a cup of tea is analysed to death -for the purpose of constantly asserting that the female character is 'in control' (and the writer not only never misses a chance to assert the heroine's being 'in control' but artificially creates reams and reams of opportunities to make such an assertion. In Milan's writing the 19th c. was, obviously, the best time for women!); and where even the minutest ripple of a motive is so loquaciously explained away that it loses both its significance and its purpose. Milan's characters are not characters at all, they are mouthpieces for the

writer's indifferent, random and forced rationalisations.

This kind of writing tends to turn its back to what is (should be?) the *raison d'être* of romance writing: the representation of the unruly elements of desire as the medium through which liberating claims travel, express themselves and become effective (i.e., formative of life), claims that lead to a redemptive exit from some awful and entangled web of social, familial and other relationships, in which characters are caught. In historical romance there's the additional demand for an ear sensitive to the requirements of one's historical setting, and I don't mean merely frocks, carriages and 'prithees', but mores, social structures and norms, gender and sexual relations, which the romance should recall to some powerful effect. If you want to write historical romance then you should take the effort to show how society would bite back and would not allow you to fulfil those desires that exceed what society symbolically shapes. In short, there is no way that the authorities would have passed over all those males and given the prize to the heroine (but Milan is so idiotically obsessed with forcing totally foreign to the 19th c. ideas of 'woman in control' that she thinks we won't notice that the heroine is really your average market research manager living across the road from Milan's house).

In the end, the whole reads and feels like an arid exercise in sanitised contemporary relationships (and this is something the more recent spade of romance writers suffer from, instead of interesting -and perverse- idealisations and fantasies of romantic love we get the sanitisation of such fantasies, with all their teeth removed). Milan wrote not a romance (even less a historical romance) but a homily on the proper etiquette for 'dating' (not love) in frocks. There's no exploration of eros (energetic, naughty, dramatic, purple or any other kind), no exploration of conflict between the sexes (and a 19th c. one for that matter) or the way they could find common ground, no exploration of the claims of desire.

Worse still, all the so-called negative elements in 'Unveiled' that were supposed to drive the drama and create some conflict are so woefully trivial and so clumsily contrived that this oppressed by the writer's manipulations reader called upon the gods to deliver her. All the hurdles (which are utterly unconvincingly presented here as insuperable conflicts) rang hollow and were nothing more than clumsy plot fiddlings to further the cause of the characters' promotion to sanitary heights. All the 'titanic' obstacles the writer tells us are insuperable (and she at once constantly states them and refuses to reveal their nature thus achieving the triple feat of being simultaneously turgid, annoying and vague) are quickly overcome and forgotten with a little bit of good will, friendly banter and, the oh so boring, age old cliche of fisticuffs-achieved male camaraderie.

If you like your lovers written by a neat and ponderously moralising hand (where the heroine's 'being in control' has to be asserted, celebrated, shouted from the rooftops and advertised on giant billboards -making a mockery of and contradicting her circumstances); if you want everything to sound like a relationships advice column in *Cosmo*; if you like your romance books pompously trying to disguise their inability to come up with a love story of note (especially a 19th c. one), or you are not too fussy about the plausibility of conflicts a book comes up with, moreover, if you like the representation of passion (for revenge, for a woman, for a man, for social recognition) to be as safe as possible, and the characters involved reeking of contemporaneity then this is the book for you, and Courtney Milan your HR high priestess du jour. Me, I found the pompous triviality of her prose and her shrill contemporary voice so unbearable that I've resolved never to go anywhere near a book that bears her name again.

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**Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says**

Ms. Milan has lived up to the promise I saw in her writing in the short story I read in *The Heart of Christmas: A Handful of Gold\ The Season for Suitors\ This Wicked Gift*. I loved the way she wrote her hero and heroine, and knew she was a writer I wanted to follow. I'm glad that she had written another story that I felt that way about. Her characters are very well-crafted, deep, complex, and textured. I found myself continually evaluating things from each one's perspective, and it was difficult to 'choose sides', which is a good thing. In real life, no person is all good and bad (at least for the most part). We are a complex mix of both, and we often make decisions out of our human drives, sometimes good and sometimes bad. In the case of Ash and Margaret, I could see what drove them, and I felt for them both. Family is very important to me as well, and even though I don't always like everything my family does, I love them, and I'd do anything for them. That's why I couldn't get mad either at Ash or Margaret at the choices they made. Even though their brothers didn't always understand the sacrifices they made for them, it was both characters' choices to give up so much for the love of their siblings. In the end, I was glad that they found each other, and realized that someone saw them truly and loved them honestly. I was glad they found their other halves, because I think that this kind of love is so valuable to humans, and they both needed it. It takes a writer of considerable skill to create such real, lovable characters, and Ms. Milan shows it.

I loved the intensity of her writing, and the strength of the story here, a romance, and a good one, but something more. I liked how she integrated the sensual moments into this love story, making them intrinsic to the development of the relationship between Ash and Margaret. I liked that Ash saw Margaret and knew she was what he wanted and needed. I liked that even though it was a seemingly bad idea to fall for Ash, Margaret did anyway. I know that she had some tough choices to make, and I was glad that she was able to make a choice that was right for her, down deep, and that that choice included Ash. I was glad their feelings for each other, that trust and understanding of each other stayed true, even in the face of what seemed insurmountable. I also loved the authenticity of the Victorian setting, drawn in subtle strokes, but very evident. I could tell that the author knows her subject, and she managed to convey that without overwhelming the narrative with facts about Victorian England and inheritance law.

Giving this book five stars is a foregone conclusion, based on its many strengths, and how much I enjoyed reading it. It was deep, rich, fascinating, sensual, intense, and rewarding. All the things I love about historical romance. Highly recommended.

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