



Proud Mary

Lucinda Brant

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Roxton Family Saga Book 4: Mary and Christopher's Happily Ever After

1770s Gloucestershire and Hampshire.

Widowed and destitute, Lady Mary Cavendish is left with only her pride. Daughter of an earl and great-granddaughter to a Stuart King, expectations demand she remarry. But not just any man will do; her husband must rank among the nobility. As always, Mary will do her duty and ignore her heart.

Country squire Christopher Bryce has secretly loved his neighbor Mary for many years. Yet, he is resigned to the cruel reality they are not social equals and thus can never share a future together. Never mind that his scandalous past and a heartbreaking secret make him thoroughly unworthy of such a proud beauty.

But with the help of a family ghost, and the never ordinary members of the Roxton family, Mary and Christopher realize that a happily ever after might just be possible.

Fans of the series will delight in being reacquainted with the fascinating, always surprising, and never ordinary members of the Roxton family.

Proud Mary Details

Date : Published March 30th 2017 by Sprigleaf

ISBN :

Author : Lucinda Brant

Format : Kindle Edition 412 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review Proud Mary for online ebook

AnnMarie says

Proud Mary: A Georgian Historical Romance, is the fifth book in the Roxton Family Series by Lucinda Brant. It can easily be read as a stand alone novel, but having read all the others in the series I thoroughly enjoyed catching up with some of the characters when they were mentioned again in this book.

Lady Mary Cavendish had an arranged marriage, an unhappy one at that, but one good thing came from it, her beautiful daughter Teddy. When Lady Mary's husband died he left her practically penniless, and the family estate and holdings in debt. In his will he stated that he wanted Squire Christopher Bryce, their neighbour, to be Teddy's guardian, and that Teddy was in no way to have any contact with Lady Mary's Roxton relatives. He held a grudge against Julian Roxton, one that he carried on after his death with his will.

Christopher has secretly been in love with Mary for years, and he loves her daughter as his own. She in fact calls him Uncle Bryce and loves him too. It's no hardship to him to be her guardian. He also spends two days a week at Mary's home as her acting steward. He is doing his best to get the place up to scratch, the debts to be paid off, and for the estate to be worthy of it's heir when he comes of age.

In the two years since Mary became a widow, Christopher has bided his time. He didn't want to be crass and let her know his feelings before her time of mourning was over, and after that year, he more or less convinced himself that even if he did let her know of his love, they could never marry because she is expected to marry a man of means, of the same class as her, not just a country squire. He may have a lot of money, even more than a lot of the nobility, but he'd never be of the same class as her, and a woman of nobility must marry up, not down. He also has some secrets that he needs to tell Mary about which could change her opinion of him for the worse. Despite knowing that, he loves Mary with all his heart and just wishes things could be different.

When somebody from Mary's past returns, somebody of the correct class, and somebody who is more than willing to offer for Mary's hand in marriage, Christopher must take stock. He is shocked when the man in question tells him that he is leaving for a month, only to return to ask Mary to marry him. He offers Christopher that month to let his feelings for Mary be known to her, to allow them to fulfil any lustful notions they have towards each other, then he will return and make a respectable married woman of her. Christopher doesn't know what to do with the offer. Could he and Mary just enjoy a month of freedom together, he is sure she has feelings towards him. But how can he possibly spend just that one month with her and then watch her marry another man?

Along side the wonderful characters of Mary and Christopher and of course her daughter Teddy, we also are introduced again to the wonderful Roxton family, including the marvellous Antonia who I have loved from the very start of the series. There is a particular scene between her and her husband Jonathan when talking about the gender of the baby she is pregnant with, that had me in floods of tears. Such a beautiful moment between them.

There is also some intrigue going on with treason afoot, and the person/s in question having to be captured. That's one of the things I love so much about this author's books, they have the perfect romantic element, the era they are set in is wonderful, but there is also a plethora of sub plots that keep you intrigued from beginning to end of each book. There is never a dull moment. The characters are all discussed in-depth, and you can't help but love the good ones, and either pity or despise the bad ones.

I loved this book and recommend it wholeheartedly. I can't wait for the next book in the series!

I voluntarily reviewed an advanced readers' copy of this book.

Lady Wesley says

The author/narrator team of Lucinda Brant and Alex Wyndham has produced another winner. And the Roxton Family Saga continues, with the upcoming release of **Satyr's Son**, the story of Lord Henri-Antoine Hesham, the beloved younger son of Antonia and her Monseigneur. I have it on good authority that he is indeed his father's son!

My five-star review of the Kindle edition of **Proud Mary** appears here.

Kiesha ~ 1Cheekyllass says

(Placeholder & a few thoughts): I have to tell you. I did not think I could like Mary. She was so mousy before. I was delightfully surprised. I love Mary & Christopher. For me the first 30 minutes were a little slow but I enjoyed this book so much that doesn't change my rating. Mary and Christopher's relationship is sweet and develops nicely. I love how Christopher helped Mary's character evolve. Ms. Brant's writing paired with Alex Wyndham is utter perfection.

Mari Christie says

One thing Lucinda Brant does particularly well in The Roxton Family Saga, a perennial favorite of mine, is tugging at the strings of stories left hanging to be woven into later books. So, in this case, we get to know Lady Mary Cavendish, whom we have met ever-so-briefly in prior books: the ill-used wife of the obnoxious Gerald Cavendish. Now, however, Mary is a sensible widow in reduced circumstances, ready to do her duty by the Roxtons and her daughter, Teddy, marrying well to meet the demands of her family's position.

Both Mary and her hero, country squire Christopher Bryce, are a healthy distance from the loftiest heights of the Roxton inner circle (as far away as Antonia ever allows any family member), and provide an earthy, almost-but-not-quite populist balance to earlier books (and, one hopes, new, more rigorous blood—and political philosophy—to the family tree). Mary is the most practical and pragmatic of Brant's heroines thus far, and Christopher is almost too steady and comfortable to be a hero in a sweeping romantic novel, with an unrelenting sense of duty similar to the Duke of Roxton.

The Roxton series is exceptionally good at showcasing the extravagant, over-the-top surroundings of a families of enormous wealth and aristocratic breeding. While characters do appear who are of more limited means or lesser class status (not usually both), the overwhelming majority of characters and settings highlight and glorify the opulence of the Georgian period. In this book, however, we are given a heroine who is of noble blood, but gentry spirit, and a hero with some money, but limited status.

As important as meeting the heroine of this book, we meet her daughter Teddy, whom we have also seen in brief flashes in prior books, but who has intrigued from her first appearance. She is central to her mother's

life, and so must be central to the reader's attentions. The contrast between the irrepressible, headstrong Teddy and [all but one of] the other children in Brant's books has always been especially marked, even if brief. Brant includes children—one cannot populate a multi-generational family saga without them. However, with two notable exceptions (I made a prediction months ago about them, which I shall reveal in due course), they are loved deeply by the central characters in the books, but to some degree sidelined in the narrative. This is, in part, the nature of children who have less life experience to draw from; in part, the “arms’ length” Georgian child-rearing system; and in part, the authorial privilege of backgrounding different parts of the story. But because of this shunting aside, when the compelling and arresting Teddy—who will never, ever allow herself to be shunted anywhere—walks onto the stage in *Proud Mary*, she is in full-color, larger than life. When she is in the proscenium, you will not be able to look away.

While Mary dithers, and Christopher quietly and competently ensures the safety of her family, each of these characters must come to terms in their own way with the fact that Christopher provides a sort of security to Mary and Teddy that cannot be bestowed by a title or instilled by great wealth.

Ermione says

Stranamente noioso. E a me solitamente piace molto la Brant.

Sempre scritto molto bene e molto accurato nel rendere l'ambiente dell'alta aristocrazia inglese di epoca georgiana... ma noioso. Tanti, troppi dialoghi ridondanti. Due protagonisti che non mi hanno toccata per niente. Soprattutto la protagonista, che più che "l'orgogliosa Mary" (la *Proud Mary* del titolo originale) verrebbe da definire "Mary la tontolona". Arriva alle conclusioni sempre per ultima e cade continuamente dal pero. La figliola di dieci anni è molto più sveglia.

Quando, nella seconda parte, tornano in scena la ormai mitica Antonia e Jonathon il romanzo si rianima un po', ma non decolla mai.

Per carità, la qualità della scrittura è al di sopra della media, ma la pancia sonnacchia... e la palpebra cala.

Lu says

Wonderful continuation of the Roxton Saga.

Mary is all proper and willing to fulfill her many duties, but she is a broken person on the inside.

Christopher is someone that came back from a dark place and wants to bring Mary to the light with him.

I love how caring and wonderful he is to her and her daughter at all times.

Lovely story, with Antonia and Jonathon after marriage life as a bonus!

Pat says

I absolutely love the writing of Lucinda Brant, in characterization, in historical accuracy and in giving us the detailed world of the Roxton family.

This segment of the continuing story of this family gives us Christopher and Mary - and her cousin Evelyn (briefly). Christopher (not being of the nobility) has loved Mary for 10 years - but with very little hope of ever winning her. Initially this is because Mary is married (unhappily) and then eventually - for the last two

years - because she is beyond his reach. Circumstances, come about that cause them to have opportunity to recognize their emotional connection while investigating an "apparent" ghost.

The first half of this story really drew me in and felt like it had great potential for a deep and beautiful romance. However somewhere in the second half it felt like there began to be too many interruptions, side stories and emotional breakdowns - so that the progression of Mary and Christopher's romance seemed to be a bit choppy and less intense than many of the others in the series. It ended up being squeezed in between christenings, arrests, long-awaited parental confrontations, and revelations.

Proud Mary is unquestionably still a 4-star read. I really can't wait for Henri, Evelyn, Teddy, and many others to have their stories. I also look forward to hearing more of Mary, Christopher, and the growing ducal families. Lucinda Brant is, without a doubt, an amazingly gifted writer, and Alex Wyndham is beyond compare as a narrator.

Peg Hughes says

If it were possible to give this 6 stars I would . This is my favourite in the Roxton family series indeed it's one of my favourite historical romances ever and I have read Mary Balough, Loretta Chase, Eloisa James et al.

This is a wonderful story beautifully written with one of the most adorable heros ever in Squire Christopher Bryce- aaaaaahhhhhh.

Proud Mary should be Poor Mary- daughter of one of the most revolting mothers / grandmothers in romance fiction who belittles and demeans her throughout her life. Then, through lack of self esteem, she ends up married to an utter pig whose vileness as both a husband and father is hard to describe though Ms Brant manages it wonderfully!

However a constant presence in her life during her life and widowhood is her neighbour Squire Bryce who has always loved her, indeed suffered a case of love at first sight, but is so far below her socially that he feels unable to share his feelings.

How they achieve their HEA with the assistance of the Duchess of Kinross who makes a very welcome appearance and 'help' from other unexpected sources is a joy to share.

As usual this is a big read, richly textured and full of period detail. I shed a few tears. I hope there's a good few books to go in the series as I'm unsure I can cope with it ending.

Carol *Young at Heart Oldie* says

This is the 4th book in Lucinda Brant's superb *Roxton Family Saga* series and, once again, I was totally captivated by Christopher and Mary's tender and beautiful love story. I know reading the previous books in the series will not only enhance your enjoyment of PROUD MARY, but they are all wonderful books in their own right and shouldn't be missed.

I always lose myself in one of Ms. Brant's books, because she writes such intelligent and intricately layered stories with finely-drawn characters, and always makes me feel as if I am stepping back in time and experiencing life through her characters' eyes.

I invariably fall in love with her heroes and Christopher is no exception. Apart from being handsome and sexy, he is also kind, generous, sincere and fair. You see this in the benevolent way he treats his tenants and workers; the way he compliments Mary on her skill at embroidery and as an artist, something no one else has ever done; the positive way he treats Teddy while her father was dismissive because she wasn't a boy.

When the eighteen-year-old Christopher discovers the truth surrounding his birth, I could understand the anger and sense of betrayal he feels towards the two people he loved and trusted. He sees himself as '*a bastard, the ill-begotten fruit of an illicit affair between two adulterers.*' His answer is to run away, something that youngsters with problems still do today. I couldn't condemn him for his choice of employment whilst abroad. Alone and destitute, he uses the only assets he has. He knows that while his position is perfectly respectable in Italian society, it would be deemed scandalous by English society. It is no surprise that, once he returns home and assumes his position as Squire Christopher Bryce, he wants to keep his family secret and scandalous past well hidden.

Mary is such a sympathetic character. No wonder she is so docile and lacking in confidence given her rigid upbringing; a childhood spent with an overbearing mother who constantly drummed into her the correct social rules; a mother who still dominates her life. Then, marriage to the odious, self-centred Sir Gerald not only compounded her insecurities, but also left her believing she is emotionally and physically cold and incapable of enjoying intimacy.

Mary is a wonderful mother and her love for Teddy shines through, and I admire her determination to give her daughter a very different childhood to her own.

...if climbing trees and riding astride and being outdoors all day made Teddy happy, then she, as her mother, would do her best to see that she could do those things.

As with all Ms. Brant's books, the romance is beautifully written; tender, romantic and sensual, without being overtly explicit. I love how Christopher and Mary each let down their guards and confide in each other about their pasts and how Mary is willing to accept Christopher's past and sees only the man he is now.

"I truly do not mind about your past; it is who I see before me that matters."

The unexpected return of someone, thought long dead, provides a definite obstacle to the romance or, perhaps not!

It is heart-warming to see Mary's new-found confidence, happiness and contentment knowing that she is truly loved.

She looked confident and content, and it radiated. He smiled to himself as he sipped his tea, at the small part he had played in her new-found self-assurance and happiness.

One of my favourite scenes is where Mary finally stands up to her appalling mother and I was positively whooping when Julian, as head of the family, gives Lady Fitzstuart an ultimatum!

I applaud Ms. Brant for not making the issue of their differing social status conveniently disappear like a puff of smoke, but she deals with it in a realistic way. Mary is aware that she will no longer be accepted by certain elements of society, but she and Christopher are content to live in the depths of Gloucestershire, and, as their marriage is accepted and supported by the Roxton family, that is all that matters.

I adore the tomboyish Teddy and how she loves Uncle Bryce as much as her true uncles. There is one very poignant scene where she gives Christopher's Aunt Kate, who is virtually blind, a personally embroidered pocket for her handkerchief.

I hated Sir Gerald for so cruelly using his daughter as a means of gaining revenge on the Duke of Roxton (Julian).

Poor Julian is often misunderstood and so I was pleased that Christopher immediately sees him as a good and honest man, one he would willingly trust with his life. I love the unlikely friendship that develops between the two men, but perhaps it is not so surprising as Mary observes...

...both were sticklers for exactness and truthfulness, both were honorable and honest, and both could be frustratingly pedantic at times.

I enjoyed all the secondary threads running through the story, the twists and surprises and the welcome appearance of familiar members of the Roxton family, especially Antonia, who seems to steal every scene she graces.

To my delight, there is also a charming Epilogue and is it possible that Teddy and Jack might get a book in the future? I do hope so.

MY VERDICT: Another superb book to add to an equally superb series. If you have not yet read this series, then you have many hours of wonderful storytelling to look forward to. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

Roxton Family Saga – series so far (click on the link below for more details):

<https://www.goodreads.com/series/7104...>

This review was originally posted on my Rakes and Rascals Blog:

<https://rakesandrascals.wordpress.com...>

Caz says

B-/3.5 stars rounded up

I'm a big fan of Lucinda Brant's and have enjoyed all of the books of hers I've listened to or read. Which is why it saddens me to say that **Proud Mary**, the fifth book in her **Roxton Family Saga**, was something of a disappointment.

The proud lady of the title is Lady Mary Cavendish, whose husband, Sir Gerald, died two years previously. Sir Gerald was a boorish brute of a man who did not treat Mary well and whose death has left his wife and ten-year-old daughter Theodora (Teddy) on the verge of destitution. Were it not for the actions of the estate's steward, Mr. Christopher Bryce, Mary and Teddy would have had to leave their home, but Bryce

keeps the truth of their situation to himself and due to his astute management and assistance they continue to live as before.

Christopher Bryce has been steward of Abbeywell Farm for something like eight years, and has been quietly in love with Mary for just as long. His good-looks and natural charm set hearts a-flutter among the local ladies, but he has eyes for none but Mary – even though he has little hope that she will ever return his affection. She is the daughter of an earl and the great-grand-daughter of a king, and he is a mere country squire – albeit a successful and wealthy one - with a rather mysterious (and unusual) past.

Having married once for the sake of family and duty and been utterly miserable, Mary is loath to remarry for the same reasons, but accepts that she will have to do so at some point. Of late, however, she has been unable to prevent her thoughts going in a different – and not at all welcome – direction. She and Christopher Bryce rarely see eye-to-eye about the estate, yet there's no denying he's an extremely attractive man and that when they aren't at odds, he is kind and agreeable company, attentive to her wishes in a way she has never before experienced.

The first part of the book is lovely, beautifully chronicling the longing Christopher and Mary feel for each other and then showing Christopher becoming more determined in his pursuit as he attempts to show Mary that they are right for each other and that they could be happy together. Mary, whose spirit has been squashed both by her obnoxious, snobbish mother and her abusive husband, takes a little time to come out of her shell, but with Christopher's coaxing and support, she decides it's time she allowed herself to experience pleasure and to have something she wants for herself, and spends an idyllic week with him squirreled away at his cottage by the river. Christopher and Mary are able to explore their physical attraction to each other discreetly, and are well on the way to making some decisions about their future, when the plot veers off in another direction, almost the entire Roxton clan reappears – and the story suddenly becomes more concerned with the progression of Antonia, Duchess of Kinross' pregnancy, and various family issues, some of which are plot threads picked up from the previous book, *Dair Devil*.

I'm grateful the author resolved these threads. But it comes at the expense of the romance between Mary and Christopher, which is pushed to one side in favour of a big Roxton reunion and means we have to wait for almost half the book for Mary's response to Christopher's proposal. When it finally comes, it is overshadowed by other developments. I will, however, say that Mary's long-awaited upbraiding of her horrible mother made me want to cheer.

Proud Mary is every bit as well-researched and well-written as Lucinda Brant's other books. Her research and attention to detail is superb and her ability to transport the reader to an earlier time and place – in this case the middle of the Eighteenth Century – really is masterful. Those aspects of the book, whether it's the outward trappings (fashions, furniture etc.) or the more important understanding and integration of custom and social convention are excellent and thoroughly enjoyable. The two protagonists, too, are terrific, well-rounded characters with a lot of depth and complexity to them, who are, in spite of the vast differences in their social stations, obviously meant for one another. But I wanted more of them together and more of the newly confident Mary who is happy and in love for the first time in her life.

I liked Christopher and Mary individually and together, and their histories – his as a man with things in his past he's not proud of and hers as the wife of a neglectful and abusive husband and the daughter of an overbearing, status-obsessed woman – mean that they have a lot to work through before they can achieve their HEA. But the intrusion of the larger family in the last third or so of the book wasn't a welcome one. I've liked all the previous stories in the series and am familiar with the characters and relationships, but this book missed the mark, and it's a shame, because the two protagonists are such great characters that I felt they

were rather wasted amid the throng.

I can't rate the book any lower than a B-/3.5 stars because the writing is excellent and the historical background is superb. But I can't rate it any higher because as a romance, it runs out of steam in the second half and in the end, falls rather flat.

Jaci says

Roxton Family Saga Book 4. I have fallen in love with The Georgian Era. It is so rich with history, clothing, the manners, and idiosyncrasies of the Aristocrats and Quality who inhabited the time period. Lucinda's books are historically correct and her books are character driven. If you have read the other books in this series you will love this one too and if you haven't this lovely book can be read as a stand-alone story.

Christopher Bryce is a local landowner who has been put in the difficult position of overseeing his late neighbors estate and co-guardian of his daughter. Lady Mary resents the intrusion into her life and her beloved daughter Teddy. Her marriage to Sir Gerald was not a happy one. Now she has another arrogant male to deal with. She is not allowed to leave the estate with her daughter. She can visit her family but cannot take Teddy with her.

Mary is furious with her late husband's will. She is not allowed to make any decisions that affect her household or worse her daughter. She presents a haughty prim, proud mask that hides the vulnerable, lovely woman who deserves to be happy. The only one who sees the real Mary is her daughter Teddy. The only saving grace is the way he and Teddy get along. Teddy calls him Uncle Bryce. Mary knows that Christopher loves Teddy too and she tolerates him because he will protect Teddy with his life.

Christopher is also keeping his true feelings for Mary behind a mask of politeness. He knows how her stupid unfeeling husband treated her. He is secretly in love with Mary and has been for years. He knows that she doesn't feel the same way. What he doesn't realize is that members of Mary's family are on his side. Roxton, Antonia, and Debra just want Mary to be happy and fall in love, and they will do anything to make Mary realize it's ok to let down her guard.

This story has many layers like a sweet and tart dessert that will have you craving more. Lucinda's stories are always centered around her characters and the Roxton family are simply Marvelous. Mary, Christopher, and Teddy are so lifelike they jump right off the pages and into your heart.

I cannot wait to listen to the next book in the Series. The Satyr's Son.

The remarkable writing by Lucinda only adds to the riveting performance of the narrator Alex Wyndham.

April says

Proud Mary by Lucinda Brant is an extraordinary Georgian Historical Romance set in the wilds of Gloucestershire, in the 1770's. Book 5 in her superb "Roxton Family Saga", series. However, each story can be read as a stand alone. In my opinion, reading the previous books would make a more enjoyable read and only enhance your experience in reading "Proud Mary". See, the following list of the "Roxton Family Saga

for your reading experience1740s NOBLE SATYR (Renard and Antonia), 1760s MIDNIGHT MARRIAGE (Julian and Deb), 1770s AUTUMN DUCHESS (Antonia and Jonathon), 1770s DAIR DEVIL (Dair and Rory).

This is the story of Christopher Bryce, a country squire, who has secretly loved Mary, his neighbor, for many years. Yet, he is resigned himself to the fact they are not social equals and thus can never share a future together. He has a heartbreaking secret and a scandalous past which makes him totally unworthy of such a proud beauty, as Mary. Lady Mary Cavendish, is destitute, a widow, left only with her pride and her child, ten-year-old tomboy, better known as, Teddy, to support and look after. She knows she must re-marry, she is after all the daughter of an earl and great-granddaughter of King Stuart II, and a cousin to the Duchess of Roxton, family expectations and obligations run high. Her husband must rank among the nobility. Will she do her duty or follow her heart? As a final act of maliciousness, Sir Gerald Cavendish, Mary's late husband names the local squire, Christopher Bryce, as co-guardian, with the Duke of Roxton, of Mary's daughter Theodora, aka "Teddy". You really have to read this story to understand the maliciousness of this act.

I was utterly and completely captivated by Mary and Christopher's beautiful love story. Teddy brought so much to this story as well. And the familiar appearance of the Roxton family members is always an added deliciousness. You can't help but love this family.

"Proud Mary" is very well written, steady paced and filled with romance, drama, family secrets and intrigue. Readers will find there is never a dull moment in "Proud Mary", nor among England's highly acclaimed 18th century, first family, the Roxtons...oh yeah, many twists and turns and surprises find their way into this beautifully and masterfully written tale of Mary, Christopher, and little Teddy's story.

Fascinating, compelling and overwhelmingly superb, in my opinion. I love the Roxton family their antics, as well as their overall determination. A fascinating family, to be sure, and "Proud Mary" was not a disappointment!

Readers will find these characters, Mary, Christopher, Teddy and some of the secondary characters, including the misunderstood Jilian, the Duke of Roxton, will capture their hearts and hold them in awe.

Another memorable saga, written in Ms. Brant's usual aplomb with her delightful and realistic characters, her eye for details and her masterful way of telling a story, that wraps readers in the warmth of a great story. Bravo, Lucinda Brant, for another outstanding story! I can't wait for SATYR'S SON (Henri-Antoine and Lisa) their story is coming soon, so excited to have an additional "Roxton Family" story forthcoming! A definite must read! Fans of historical fiction, intrigue, family secrets, family sagas, and the premise of finding a HEA, will surely enjoy "Proud Mary", I certainly did.

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Rating: 5

Heat rating: Mild

Reviewed by: AprilR

Wendy says

I recently read a review of a Lucinda Brant novel which said that reading her books is like eating chocolates...you just can't stop at one. That's it in a nutshell for me because I love every book she has ever written and wait with eager anticipation for a new addition to her list, in this case **PROUD MARY** book five in her acclaimed and addictive *Roxton Family Saga*

Ms. Brant's holistic approach is quite unique. Her books are wonderfully romantic but her stories are also very family orientated, a style which really appeals to me, and which I feel reflects life. Once that first flush of all-consuming, instalust/romantic love has waned then there must be something solid to build a life and family upon, and I like how she reflects that in this series. I'm also a sucker for a good epilogue and, with such a long, continuing saga, we have been privy to an epic one! With the Roxton family, Lucinda Brant has created a wonderfully complex Georgian aristocratic family whose story develops over a period of more than thirty years. The love and support they feel for each other is evident in every book throughout the series. Her remarkable talent for creating living, breathing people, who we remember vividly and with great affection, is where I feel Ms. Brant excels over so many others writing in this genre. I can think of only one other favourite author who has achieved this in an ongoing saga, with characters I adore and remember vividly.

Each book *could* be read and enjoyed individually but, quite honestly, I wouldn't recommend it. This series is such a feast and so much of the pleasure of reading it comes from following her fascinating characters - experiencing their mistakes, loves, their growing families and their progress and maturing in later life. I also admire her skill in making her readers feel as though we are **all** members of the intriguing and loveable Roxton family.

In **Proud Mary**, it is the turn of the utterly gorgeous, Squire Christopher Bryce and Lady Mary Cavendish to find love and happiness within the Roxton clan. Having originally met eight years earlier, it was love-at-first-sight for Christopher but an over-bearing, unloving mother who had denigrated and bullied her all her life, a father who deserted her and marriage to the odious, sycophantic and obsequious, Sir Gerald Cavendish, have left Mary with a sad case of lack-of-self-esteem. It's therefore difficult for her to believe that a man such as Christopher could find her attractive. Although secretly very attracted to him - who wouldn't be? - she would never have considered showing it. So, the two have just worshipped each other from afar for eight years, even after Mary is widowed. The three components for love and a life together - the right person, the right place, the right time - were not initially aligned, but with the sudden appearance of a mysterious 'ghost' comes the catalyst for that alignment and the flame of Christopher's and Mary's secret love is finally ignited and is all the better for the waiting.

Ms. Brant is known for her subtlety in her 'bedroom scenes' but, in **Proud Mary**, she allows us a little more than a glimpse of the beautifully sensual connection between two people who deserve to find love. However, the course of true love seems unlikely to run smoothly because, although Christopher is a wealthy and innovative businessman and the much-respected local Squire, albeit with a few shocking secrets yet to be revealed, he is also Mary's social inferior, as she is the daughter of an earl and the cousin of a duke. In addition, under Sir Gerald's will, Christopher has been appointed to the lowly position of steward of the estate and lands held in trust for Sir Gerald's underage heir, Jack Cavendish. He spends a couple of days per fortnight at the estate, which has been almost bankrupted by Sir Gerald's excesses. Mary and her ten-year-old daughter, Teddy (Theodora) live on the estate under strict economies as Christopher works to increase and repair its fortunes. For spiteful reasons, Sir Gerald has also stipulated that Teddy becomes his steward's ward, in effect denying Lady Mary any real control over her daughter, and he has also decreed that Teddy may not visit her Roxton relatives. This, however, has made little difference in Teddy's world as she adores

her 'Uncle Bryce' and likes to be nowhere better than in her corner of the Cotswolds and preferably with him.

Enter Antonia, arriving like a whirlwind as usual and making her presence known. She is the common thread that runs throughout the Roxton series and I just adore her character. In the first book of the series, **Noble Satyr**, Antonia is an intelligent but precocious seventeen-year-old, setting her cap at the dissolute Duke of Roxton, twenty years her senior, and her success in that quest is apparent in the ensuing books in the series. Over a period of thirty years, she has loved, lost, suffered and loved again and is still an incredibly beautiful, vivacious, fifty-year-old who is beloved by all and who loves fiercely in return. At some point in the series, pretty much every family member has sought her wise council and, as she puts her mind to resolving Mary and Christopher's conundrum, we see her in all her splendid glory.

I do marvel at Ms. Brant's clever and devious mind, because an apparently throwaway remark made a few books earlier in the series will suddenly take on great significance. I've had more than one light-bulb moment when a character I vaguely remember suddenly becomes important. Christopher's Aunt Kate is one such character and, if I hadn't read the previous books, her significance would have been lost to me. I have often wondered how the author keeps everything straight in her mind - the intricate plotting and the intertwining lives of her characters. I think this is one reason why re-reading (or re-listening with the talented Alex Wyndham) her books is even more enjoyable because there is always something I've missed. Her books are great 'keepers' and much loved additions to my book shelves.

I must mention darling little Teddy, Lady Mary's daughter, one of the stars of **Proud Mary**. She is such a beautifully developed and compelling little character who steals the show on more than one occasion. She has been encouraged by her mother and her beloved 'Uncle Bryce' to be a free spirit. She is never happier than when climbing trees or roaming the glorious Cotswolds hills and dales with Christopher's dog, and Ms. Brant's earlier career as a teacher in a girls' school is very apparent in the intuitive way she brings Teddy's character to life. There are some amusing moments when, in the way of a child who has heard or seen something they aren't meant to, she unwittingly drops her guilelessly stored 'bomb' into a conversation with adults, causing havoc and often throwing those around her into uproar or helpless laughter while naively tucking into her dinner, completely unaware of the impact her innocent comments have made.

Lucinda Brant's research is phenomenal, with nothing left to guess work, even down to the Blue Coat school Christopher attended as a boy which is only briefly mentioned but which Ms. Brant has researched extensively. And I must admit to becoming more than a little excited about Mr. Smeaton's water wheel, the name rang a bell with me immediately; this is the same Smeaton of lighthouse fame. I've actually climbed to the top of his lighthouse on Plymouth Hoe in Devonshire. I live in the Cotswolds where this story is set and now look at it with new eyes after reading **Proud Mary**. Perhaps I previously took it all for granted, but I can certainly confirm that Ms. Brant has perfectly captured the beauty and essence of this gorgeous area of the British Isles. As always, the sumptuous fashions and furnishings of the Georgian period are described in exquisite detail, bringing the opulence of this captivating period in British history to sparkling life. Ms. Brant's Pinterest Boards contain all her research and they are works of art in themselves.

I shall be very sad when Lucinda Brant brings this series to a close and I know that time is looming. But I reassure myself with the fact that it's all on my kindle, book shelves and audio library to reach for whenever I need a-love-and-fuzzy-feeling fix! I am so looking forward to **SATYR'S SON** which is a very apt title to bring this superb series full circle.

eyes.2c says

Loved this addition to the series.

Lady Wesley says

Lucinda Brant never disappoints. Please visit **Romantic Historical Reviews--Where History Meets Passion** to read an excerpt from **Proud Mary** and a chance to win a copy of the book. ONLY THREE DAYS LEFT TO WIN.

Lucinda Brant's fifth volume in the **Roxton Family Saga** is every bit as good as the four novels that preceded it, and they were all solid five-star reads in my opinion. Historical romance series featuring large families and covering a sizable period of time are one of my favorites, and the Roxton books fill that bill. The series begins in Paris in 1745, moves to Georgian England, and covers nearly thirty years, during which the expected births, deaths, love affairs, marriages, and babies occur.

Proud Mary opens in 1777 and features Lady Mary Cavendish, widow of Sir Gerald Cavendish, Bt., who has been dead for two years. Sir Gerald and Lady Mary were minor characters in the earlier books, where we learned that Gerald was a conceited bag of hot air who was shunned by Polite Society, disliked by his neighbors, and cruel to his wife and daughter. Lady Mary was completely under his thumb, which is not surprising since she grew up with a domineering snob of a mother, the Countess of Strathsay.

Sir Gerald was both impressed and envious that Mary was the daughter of an earl, a great-granddaughter of King Charles II, and a cousin to the Duchess of Roxton. Indeed, beginning when she was twelve, Mary had spent the happiest years of her life living at Roxton's estate as a member of the family. When she returned to her mother, Lady Strathsay drilled into Mary's head that women of her station had a higher calling than their inferiors, that she must precisely follow the rigid rules of society, and that she owed a duty to her noble lineage to marry well and produce sons. Mary was so browbeaten and miserable that she accepted an arranged marriage to Sir Gerald.

Now Sir Gerald is dead, leaving Mary with a nice estate (for her lifetime), Abbeywood, and a mountain of debts. In a final act of maliciousness, Gerald named the local squire, Christopher Bryce, as co-guardian, with the Duke of Roxton, of Mary's daughter Theodora. "Teddy," as she is known to all is a ten-year-old tomboy who likes nothing better than riding and hiking the wilds of Gloucestershire. She has no desire to visit London or her Roxton cousins at their palatial estate, Treat. Indeed, although Teddy is ignorant of it, Squire Bryce has followed Sir Gerald's command to forbid Teddy from leaving Abbeywood, other than her yearly visit to her grandmother in Cheltenham. She adores her "Uncle Christopher," and he clearly returns the feeling. Seeing the sweet interplay between them is the first hint that Christopher has a heart beneath his overly sober exterior.

Christopher is charged with running Abbeywood and helping retire the debts that Gerald left behind. He is a strict administrator, and Mary chafes under his budgetary restraints, as well as his refusal to allow Teddy to meet the rest of her family. Mary politely loathes him, and while he is punctiliously correct toward Mary, he has quietly been in love with her since he returned to Gloucestershire eight years ago.

Christopher's years away from home are a mystery to Mary and the rest of their neighbors, and Christopher

knows that his shameful secrets from that time would horrify a gentle lady such as Mary. For reasons unknown, he left suddenly for the Continent at the age of eighteen and cut himself off entirely from his parents. More than a decade later, he returned home to nurse his dying mother and brought his blind Aunt Kate to live with him. Unbeknownst to everyone, he also has done a bit of spying for England's Spymaster General, Lord Shrewsbury, and to that end he had befriended Sir Gerald, whom Shrewsbury suspected of selling secrets to the French.

Squire Bryce was portrayed as dour and tyrannical in the previous Roxton book **Dair Devil**, which led me to have some skepticism about his suitability as a hero in this book. Ms. Brant, however, cleverly allows the reader to discover the real Christopher at the same time that Mary does. They begin to have forthright conversations, and along with Mary we learn that Christopher is an honorable man, with strong principles but also strong emotions, which he keeps deeply hidden. Christopher grows more deeply in love with Mary, but knowing that she is an aristocrat and he is the son of nobody, he accepts that there can never be anything between them. He also comes to realize that Gerald had lied and exaggerated about virtually everything – even claiming that Roxton was Teddy's true father. Gerald was no spy, Christopher decides, and so the hunt must continue.

Mary feels an attraction to Christopher, but she does not consider him as a possible mate even though she is desperately lonely. When speaking of her cousin Antonia, recently remarried after the old Duke's death, Mary considered her own situation. She was thirty years old and had never been in love or been loved by a worthy man. She had never shared a passionate kiss with any man, nor had the selfish Sir Gerald ever shown her pleasure in the marriage bed. She loves her daughter with all her heart, but hopes she still has the capacity to love a man. Since her mother was insisting that it was Mary's duty to her family to marry again, perhaps she would find love with a new husband.

When Teddy announces one evening that there is a ghost in the house, Christopher and Mary join forces to discover tangible evidence of an intruder and set out to detect his true identity. His unmasking turns their little world upside down and threatens to bring an end to their budding romance, for the ghost is actually the man whom Mary once hoped to marry. I won't disclose more, as I think the clever twists and turns of this story should not be spoiled.

Mary and Christopher make a lovely couple, and all of my misgivings about him melted away. In fact, by the time Mary realizes that she has fallen in love with him, I was a little bit in love too. It was wonderful to watch Mary fall for him, always fighting her mother's little voice in her head pointing out his unsuitability for an earl's daughter. Equally wonderful was watching Mary gain confidence in herself and fighting to overcome the years of being denigrated and bullied by her mother and her husband. Christopher, for his part, gradually and with great reluctance reveals his past to a shocked Mary, expecting at every turn that she will turn away from him in disgust. Of course, she does not.

I always feel a bit like a time traveler when reading one of Ms. Brant's books. Using her impeccable research, she creates such an authentic 18th century world, and employing her wonderful imagination, she writes multi-layered stories with intricate plots. These talents are put to particularly good use in **Proud Mary**. I think that we 21st century readers often have a difficult time appreciating the class-based strictures of the past, and many authors who write cross-class romances downplay the difficulties that would have faced the duke who married his housekeeper, for example. Ms. Brant does not fall into the trap of making things easy for Mary and Christopher, however, and I felt a better understanding of how oppressive, yet widely accepted, the class structure was. It helps here that Mary's Roxton relations were accepting of their relationship, but then we have seen in earlier books that they are somewhat non-conformist and powerful enough to do as they please.

As Christopher and Mary work toward their happily ever after, we get to see all of her extended family – Cousin Antonia, formerly the Dowager Duchess of Roxton and now the Duchess of Kinross; her lusciously sexy husband, Jonathan; her son Julian, now the duke, his wife, Deb, and their growing brood of adorable children; and her schoolboy younger son Henri-Antoine and his pal Jack Cavendish, who will succeed to Sir Gerald's title upon reaching his majority. Besides her Roxton relatives, we also see Mary's brother Dair, now the Earl of Strathsay, and his wife, Rory, and of course, Mary and Dair's mother, Lady Strathsay. They, along with young Teddy, all play a role in bringing Christopher and Mary together – well, except for Mary's mother, who is appalled by the mismatch. One of my favorite scenes was when Mary tells her mother what's what.

Ms. Brant has said that her next book will be Henri-Antoine's story, but dare we hope that someday there is one pairing Teddy and Jack? I suppose that I am looking for ways for the Roxton Family Saga to continue for a long time. I will add that while **Proud Mary** can be read as a standalone, there is much more pleasure to be had by reading the series in order and learning to know and love this family as much as I and many other readers have. Each book has been a joy to read, and I cannot recommend them highly enough.
