



# The Importance of Being Wicked

*Miranda Neville*

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## **The Importance of Being Wicked** Miranda Neville

The rules of society don't apply to Caro and her coterie of bold men and daring women. But when passions flare, even the strongest will surrender to the law of love...

Thomas, Duke of Castleton, has every intention of wedding a prim and proper heiress. That is, until he sets eyes on the heiress's cousin, easily the least proper woman he's ever met. His devotion to family duty is no defense against the red-headed vixen whose greatest asset seems to be a talent for trouble...

Caroline Townsend has no patience for the oh-so-suitable (and boring) men of the ton. So when the handsome but stuffy duke arrives at her doorstep, she decides to put him to the test. But her scandalous exploits awaken a desire in Thomas he never knew he had. Suddenly Caro finds herself falling for this most proper duke...while Thomas discovers there's a great deal of fun in a little bit of wickedness.

## **The Importance of Being Wicked Details**

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# From Reader Review The Importance of Being Wicked for online ebook

## Cassie says

Okay, I feel like I'm taking crazy pills here. I make it a point to be very discerning in my reviews. I will give a 3 to something I still enjoyed very much. I almost never read anything that has below a 3.7 rating, because there's so many good HRs out there, that I can afford to be picky. The ONLY reason I picked of a Miranda Neville book was because I saw Duke of Dark Desires was a new release and I have a thing for undercover and disguises stories so I pre-ordered it on a whim. And I LOVED it. It is one of the few 5 stars I've given an HR. If o had seen the reviews for it now, I would not have picked it up.

I say all this because I've since read 2 more Neville books, and though they aren't as good as Duke, they were still really good reads! I don't understand how this can possibly be a 3.4. It boggles my mind  
I'm not used to being in the minority in book opinions (except for teen fiction; those Maria Snyder book reviews are ridiculous) so this is very unsettling to me.

I think that Neville's writing style just speaks to me. In the 3 books I've read of hers, the romance has been a slow build. The characters transition very slowly from being at odds, to being in love. Her writing is also careful... I don't feel like she spends too much time dwelling on details. Her secondary characters are interesting. All her characters are flawed in their own way. She doesn't exclusively write rakes. These are all so important to me.

I've started out reading this one and #3 by reading the excerpts on her website, and been hooked both times. I recommend checking those out if you're on the fence.

Anyways! Had to get that off my chest! I'll stop raving about Miranda Neville now!

So I loved this book. I loved that the hero was the first one to fall in love. I think that is fabulous, and something that is so rare in romances. I HATE when the hero pulls shit like "I won't let them hurt the woman I love- wait did I just say that?! ::le gasp:.". I think that it's such a stupid stereotype that men can't fall in love easily. So this book gets mad props for that.

Thomas is also very inexperienced in the bedroom which I also thought was sweet. I hate the stereotype in HRs that every man is a notorious rake sex god widow banging extraordinaire. It was very nice to see him learn along the way - when have you ever read a heroine that was unfulfilled while still being passionate? It's refreshing to have that little bit of realism.

Thomas was just a sweetheart in general. I felt like he got over his assholeishness pretty quickly. I don't love the overused big misunderstanding trope and I feel like that held back his character a lot, but the way he treated Caro by the end made up for it.

I'm surprised by how many people disliked Caro. She is so fun! I sympathize with her character, I think her struggle is a very believable one. She is trying to cling to her way of life, and things are falling down around her. Despite this, she is full of life. She likes to tease and play, and that's something I admire in a heroine. None of this virgin-being-corrupted bullshit. She is the one doing the corrupting (not just of the hero) and I love it!

I really liked Caro's struggle with the memory of her previous husband. I think that it was handled SO well. Her feelings were so mixed up at the beginning, it was nice to see her cling to them and then slowly let them unravel.

I would have liked to see how the revelation of who Thomas' sisters' father played out. Perhaps it will be covered in book 2?

I will say there is one advantage to reading them backwards: the heroes in the later books are very unlikeable in the previous ones. I have no idea how she's going to turn me around on Marcus. We shall see.

I think this is my longest review yet. I hope that if anyone ends up reading this, they'll give it another chance.

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## **CaroleDee says**

After happily devouring Miranda Neville's Burgundy Club series I was thrilled with the opportunity to read her debut of a spinoff series The Importance of Being Wicked. Unfortunately, no matter how hard I tried I could not enjoy it :(

I found the heroine, Caroline aka Caro, unlikeable. She idealizes her alcoholic/gambling addict late husband to excess. She acts irresponsibly towards the care of her innocent cousin. She lets her 'friends' treat her like a complete doormat. But the most damning thing, to me, was she married Thomas, The Duke of Castleton, with great enthusiasm but it took months into their marriage and a great tragedy before she showed her true self to a man that she was supposedly completely smitten with. The whole thing was hard for me. Thomas is a wonderfully written respectable gentleman, if not a bit stuffy (Caro actually refers to him as Lord Stuffy to her friends throughout the book!) He's absolutely in love with her and she keeps him, emotionally, at arms length for the first 250 pages of the book! I felt horrible for the man. He's 30 years old but reminds me more of a naive, sheltered teenaged boy. Caro's character reminded me more of the 'opportunistic female villain' of historical romances rather than the heroine.

Perhaps I'm being harsh because I did love the Burgundy Club so much, and my expectations were too high. I was expecting more of the previous series's formula of mystery, intrigue, and love. What I got was an unbelievable match, almost no drama, and an extremely unlikeable heroine :(

There were a few saving graces to The Importance to Being Wicked. The last 100 pages (when the 'real' Caro finally introduced herself to Thomas) were great. After she decided to stop acting like a rebellious child the relationship was finally believable and highly enjoyable to read.

Oliver, a 'starving artist' type that lives in Caro's carriage house, was funny and refreshing. His open and honest charm was a breathe of fresh air in contrast to the heroine's personality.

I'm just not sure if I can recommend this one. I'm hoping that Neville can bring back the spark in future installments of this series, until then I'll just reread the Burgundy Club series and try to stop hating Caro so much :)

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## **Lisa says**

Caroline Townsend is dealing with the death of her husband and trying to find a way to pay all the debts left behind and with her generous nature, she finds it hard to turn away her late husband's artistic, struggling friends. A bright spot is the arrival of her dear cousin, Anne who is coming to meet her potential fiancé, Thomas, Duke of Castleton. It quickly becomes clear that this proper man, or Lord Stuff as Caro comes to call him, will not suit for Anne and does not fit in with Caro's more carefree lifestyle...but the attraction between Thomas and Caro is there and hard to ignore. When Caro attempts to settle on of her larger debts, Thomas is there to sweep her away and this forces a change in their relationship. However, Thomas needs to marry for money so how can he throw away the chance to marry for money (Anne) for the chance to marry for love and passion (Caro)? Will he choose duty or love? Will Caro be able to find a balance for her feelings for Thomas, a balance between proper and free?

What a fun, sexy, enjoyable easy read! I really like to read a good book sometimes without major conflict, without loads of action and with feelings expressed without having to pull teeth and I felt Miranda Neville delivered with this one. Caro is a delight...free spirited, kind, loving and a wonderful teacher to Thomas about all things wicked! Thomas is the perfect, proper, stuffy gentleman who knows his duty but can see importance to learning all things wicked. I did feel like the story was a bit slow in the beginning but it really picked up for me half way through and I finished it in one sitting to see how it all played out. I think the reason it was a bit slow for me was all the other characters are introduced for the upcoming stories and it detracted from the romance blooming a bit. However, by the end I loved how the author weaved in just enough tidbits about the upcoming stories that I am very anxious for them now as they all look quite scandalous! I enjoyed watching Thomas go through a slew of emotions of his feelings for Caro but how he never backed down once he made up his mind, even when some secrets from his mother's past is revealed. Caro also stayed true to her feelings once she realized them and this was a nice surprise for me as I was worried she would be a bit flighty in that regard. And even though this is a very easy read, there is a touch of heartbreak that had me heart sinking that adds just a bit of drama. Art collecting isn't really my interest but it was touched just enough on without overwhelming the storyline. Overall, a smashing start to a new series that I thoroughly enjoyed. 4 stars

*eARC provided by Avon Books via edelweiss*

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## **Huma Rashid says**

The Importance of Being Wicked is the debut novel in Miranda Neville's new series about some rather badly behaved women. Caroline Townshend is a notorious widow, whose elopement at the age of 17 with a member of the ton caused quite a scandal. Her husband passed on about six years later, leaving her shackled with his gambling debts and a valuable Titian that she has hidden from her creditors and friends and refuses to sell. Caro is playing chaperone to her lovely cousin, Anne, and receives her suitor, His Grace Thomas Something or Other, Duke of Somewhere, one of the royal dukes. Angst ensues as Caro and Thomas find themselves attracted to one another.

This story, with its set of male friends (the rag tag group of wild young men led by Caro's late husband, Robert Townshend) is reminiscent of Elizabeth Hoyt's Spinners' Falls series, with the four soldiers searching for answers about a friend's supposed death and the betrayal of a British regiment in the colonies.

However, the similarities (a group of unlikely young men held together by strange bonds of friendship and duty) end there. Whereas Hoyt's series and individual books were well written with tight narrative structure, well crafted dialogue, and well thought out and well planned characters that remained solid and consistent in their sense of selves, Neville's story feels like two jagged halves of a puzzle that just won't come together.

I really do hate writing bad reviews, especially when I have basically been gifted with the book. I always feel like I'm unfairly attacking the author, even if I keep my criticisms strictly confined to the text itself. A writer works hard on his or her manuscript, and there's so much effort and heart that goes into each book, and I feel kind of dejected when I'm not able to provide positive feedback on such extraordinary effort. Still, I loathe giving dishonest reviews more, so I shall forge on and explain all the reasons that this book merits 1 star in my opinion.

To be fair, this is the second Miranda Neville book I have read, and it is MUCH better than the first book I stumbled upon. It's clear that not only has her writing style improved, but her knack for writing love scenes has as well. In addition to that, her sense of plot development and characterization, even dialogue, has improved between these two texts. I can't remember the name of the first text, but the main character was jokingly named "Owlverly" for Iverly, and Neville had basically smashed the plots of about four or five different books into one, which compounded my frustration and exasperation with the book. In that sense, it's clear that she has improved quite a bit as a writer, and that's wonderful.

But this story just doesn't work.

For one thing, the pacing seemed weird. By page 40, the characters are just dying to get each other in bed, which never makes sense to me. They've only just met, and I don't 'buy' it. That was where most of my problems with this story came from, actually: I just didn't 'buy' the attraction. I didn't feel it was explained - or shown! - well enough just WHY these characters were attracted to each other, why they were so passionately moved by each other.

Don't get me wrong, I understood the characters. I even liked them both well enough, I suppose. But I absolutely did not understand them together - the couple unit just did not make sense to me no matter how hard I tried to fill in the blanks on my own. There was no moment when I realized, oh, they truly care for each other, or, they are really strongly drawn to each other because of \_\_\_\_.

It doesn't help any sense of cohesion in their relationships/personalities that these characters have occasionally bizarre personality quirks. Thomas is described as stuffy and proper. That's fine, but when a grown man of 29 questions whether it's 'proper' to have sex before noon, or if it's 'proper' to touch a woman's pubic region, he ceases being stuffy and proper and respectable and instead looks like an idiot. A hopelessly immature idiot.

As for Caroline, she can be a brat. I found her character charming enough in the beginning, given to spurts of fancy and whimsy that I felt suited her, the way Neville had set her up. But before long, it began to wear thin. Her rapidly shifting moods just seemed to indicate some kind of personality disorder rather than a charming exuberance. She's described as flighty, and I'm sure Neville hopes to make this a compliment, but given her antics throughout the book, the negative connotation of the word is far more apt. One scene in particular struck me as ridiculous: Thomas and Caro have been married for two weeks (and have been making the most of their honeymoon and growing much closer) and then when he criticizes her friends, she declares, "Thomas, you despise me."

Okay.

I had to put the book down and roll my eyes for about five minutes over that one. It was just another indication that the character had been poorly planned. Caro does not seem to grow steadily throughout the story. There are no small moments that can be traced together, referred to as 'baby steps' until the moment of self-revelation toward the end of the book where she realizes she is deeply loved for who she is and manages to step out of the insecurities she's cloaked herself in for years. This is also part of what I meant when I said the pacing was weird. There didn't seem to be any steady (even if negligible, changes made bit by almost imperceptible bit!) character development for either of these two.

And that problem was compounded by the fact that I really didn't understand why they loved each other. That's the author's biggest job in a romance novel: to really sell you on the fact that these two people care for each other as the story progresses. I never got that feeling. Oh, I understood that they desperately wanted to fall into bed. But that was it.

Aside from Thomas being immaturely 'proper' at times and Caro being a brat, I just didn't feel the proper connection to the characters. I said earlier that I liked them well enough, but I didn't get why I was supposed to find either one attractive. With Caro, it seemed to be mostly about her looks and a bit about her personality - after all, there *is* something attractive about a woman who loves fun and spontaneity. That, I understood. But with Thomas, the emphasis was basically on his noble, proper character, and the fact that he was big. Just as there's often a spark in real life when two people meet and sense an attraction, there is a spark that exists between reader and characters in novels, that makes the reader root for those characters and almost wish them to be real. I never once felt that.

And for that matter, all of these problems mentioned so far explain in large part why I never really rooted for either character. I liked them well enough but I didn't particularly care if they ever got together and made it to their Happily Ever After or not. I was about a third of the way into the book when I realized that I felt it had become a chore to finish it, and slogged through the rest reluctantly because that connection - to the story, to the characters - just wasn't there. I honestly didn't care if Thomas and Caro struck a happy marriage or not.

I will say that I loved the supporting cast, for the most part, and that's what makes me want to read the rest of the books in this series (I think), even though I was less than impressed with this one. I enjoyed Anne, who seemed delightful (when she wasn't roped into boring conversations with Thomas). I loved the Duke of Denford and his flirtation with his estranged friend's wife, Cynthia. I'd love to read more about him.

But even with the supporting cast, there were problems. I understood from the beginning that Caro loved her husband's friends and despite her finances wanted to keep an open house. There's something admirable in that. Granted, there's a big difference between being a hospitable host when people come to visit you, and intentionally going beyond your means to keep the wine flowing, but I've already poked at this book enough and won't go into that. Let's just say that I thought it was nice that she wanted to create a warm, safe place for her less privileged friends to meet and relax.

But there were issues with how that was developed. For one thing, Denford was written as an unusual character. Neville implores us to believe that he and Caro are dear friends, that they're not attracted to each other, that Julian wouldn't purposely hurt Caro. But his dogged pursuit of the supposedly lost Titian DOES jeopardize Caro's well being in several ways. I didn't like how that angle was played at all: to my mind, it destroyed any inkling of true regard between the two because I couldn't quite believe that a real friend would have done or said the things Julian did.

And Oliver was another matter - and much more infuriating. He is supposedly Caro's best friend, but he

mooches off of her, doesn't pay her back on the debts he owes, doesn't even pay rent, and constantly blabs her secrets around town - including that she still has the Titian, which is what makes Horner come after her in the first place, and results in Caro almost having to become his mistress. Furthermore, when she becomes engaged, instead of being happy for her despite what it might mean for him, Oliver engages in underhanded pranks just because he's afraid that he won't have a place to live anymore, and it makes him seem really, hopelessly immature. (Granted, the prank wasn't that big a deal, but one got the sense that Oliver hoped it would cause some trouble between Caro and Thomas.)

These are Caro's friends, and none of them seem properly happy that she's found someone who treats her well, who she thinks highly of in return.

In addition to these development problems, there were issues with the writing. The dialogue was thoroughly unexceptional, and there were entire passages where the sentences felt flat and ... boring. At times I wondered if I was reading "See Spot Run" instead, it was that bad. (I'm specifically thinking of the scene at the masquerade ball where Thomas gets into a fight - it should have been a very moving, action-packed, exhilarating scene, but the sentences felt so flat and uninspired that I stifled a yawn as I read through it.)

There were so many problems with this book, the way I saw it, that it became an actual chore to finish. I feel horrible giving a bad review, but I'm certainly not going to lie and say that I enjoyed this book when I didn't. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone.

...But at the same time, I'd be interested in tuning in again, especially for Julian's story as the new Duke of Denford. Neville's writing seemed especially lively and warm when Julian was in a scene, so I got the sense that she really liked this character and was happy to write for him, and that enthusiasm translates well onto a page even if the rest of the formal aspects of writing aren't that impressive. (See my review of Maya Rodale's *Seducing Mister Knightly*, which I enjoyed quite a lot even though it wasn't the most polished novel I've ever read.)

I have mixed views of Neville, and I hope one day to like her work, but as far as this book goes, I didn't enjoy it and I wouldn't mention it as a recommendation to another romance-reader.

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## **Diana says**

Rating: B-

I have to admit I am giving this story a higher rating not because I was full on enjoying it (I did, definitely a C+) but I was greatly impressed with the way the author portrayed the characters and their actions in this story.

Caro was a wonderful character to read about because she didn't do the expected. She wasn't one of the cookie cutter misses traditionally found in these romances. I do enjoy this traditional standard of historical romance occasionally. I grew up reading authors like Johanna Lindsey and Jude Deveraux and still enjoy them to this day. What I am saying is you don't realize something has become same ole, same ole until someone steps out of the box and makes you take notice.

Of course, there were parts of this story that were silly and somewhat cheesy, with other parts of the story beyond the believable. I remembered thinking Caroline's references to Thomas as "Lord Stuff" were getting



old. However, these moments were eclipsed by the realistic portrayal of a couple falling in love despite opposite backgrounds, instances where the couple struggled with trust and secrets, and the moments when each character realized that love doesn't always mean a happy ending.

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## **Mandi Schreiner says**

This book gives us two unlikely people to fall in love – a Duke, nicknamed Lord Stuffy, who while is no means desolate, would prefer to marry a rich heiress. And a widowed heroine who parties, doesn't care for the rules of the ton, and because of her late husband's debts, owes many people money. My main problem with this book is that by the end, I still wasn't convinced these two had a love match or that they would live happily ever after...forever and ever.

Caroline Townsend, or Caro to her friends ran off at the age of 17 and married a wild 'bad boy' of the ton. After he dies and leaves her with debt, Caro consolidates and tries to live a fiscally careful life. She surrounds herself with good friends, including Oliver Breams, a struggling artist who falls in love every two days with a different woman. Caro is estranged from her own family, due to her running away to get married, so she considers her crazy, rambunctious friends her adopted family. Her cousin Anne is a rich heiress who has been good friends with Caro since she was young. When Anne's guardians leave for business, Anne slyly arranges a stay with Caro in London.

Anne is being courted by Thomas, Duke of Castleton. Every Duke in this line has married well, as the Dukedom didn't start with a lot of money. Thomas sees it as his duty to marry Anne, and same with her. But the problem is, Thomas and Anne don't mesh. At all. Anne loves ancient history and artifacts. Thomas...doesn't. He can't keep his eyes off the vibrant Caro. He knows his duty should be pointing him in the other direction, but he can't help himself. When another debt of her late husband's gets brought up, Caro starts to truly worry about her financial situation. She has a priceless painting hidden deep within her house, that her beloved husband gave to her, and many are sniffing out that she might still have it. This painting is a reminder that her husband really loved her, before he became consumed with gambling and desperate not to part with it, she must find a way to keep the creditors at bay.

Thomas is dull. Lord Stuffy. The Duke of Stuffiness. He had a mistress before he met Caro and he didn't even realize women could orgasm. Nor has he ever had oral pleasure. (apparently his mistress was dull too!). He is not really social nor light-hearted. He is a simple man, and he knows this. But he follows the rules of society, and never shirks his duty. But he meets Caro and he demands fun. She puts him into situations that makes him feel alive again. Which is all very good and dandy. Except as I said at the beginning, I was never fully convinced these two are a love match. I liked seeing Caro liven up Thomas's life and Thomas be a solid rock for Caro. But, I just didn't feel the chemistry between them. Eventually, there is lots of in the sheets action for these two, and while it was sexy, and I could understand the two of them being physically attracted to each other, the 'forever in love' part didn't come through for me.

This book has cute moments. Especially moments between Caro and her friends. But overall, it is slow. I got tired of the painting storyline, as everyone keeps asking Caro if she has it and snooping around. While the book starts with Thomas trying to court Anne, they both quickly realize they don't fit, and I liked that there wasn't massive drama with this decision.

This has a cute start and I individually enjoyed Caro and Thomas. Just didn't love them together.

Rating: C+

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### **Aly is so frigging bored says**

DNF 72%

I just can't stand Caro any more! What idiot buys more shit just not to pay the debts she already has?! And she lets her friends eat at her house and she lets them borrow her money just because she feels guilty. WTF? I don't even understand WHY she should feel guilty! And the poor Duke just goes along with her crap!

It started so promising but it has turned into a disaster!

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### **Janga says**

I loved it! The first scene between the H/H is wonderful, one of my favorite meet scenes ever. Full review will be posted at Just Janga later this month.

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### **Manda Collins says**

Miranda Neville writes so beautifully that I have to read her books carefully so I don't miss a drop of language or nuance. I loved the period details, from how to open a regency wine bottle to all the artistic and fashion details. But what sold this book for me was the not always placid relationship between the proper Duke of Castleton and the widowed free spirit Caro. I loved how they were both so genuinely interested in one another, despite their differences. And I especially appreciated that they behaved (for the most part) like adults. I was sad to finish the Burgundy Club books, but I think I'll enjoy this new series just as well. Loved it!!!

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### **Katie(babs) says**

Whenever I hear Miranda Neville has a new release coming out, I want to do the Snoopy Dance. She's one of my all time favorite historical romance authors. Every single one of her books I've read have been extremely enjoyable, and for the most part her books end up on my keeper shelf. Avon has a great thing with Miranda and her latest release, *The Important of Being Wicked*, the first book in her Wild Quartet series. It's a big shining star of awesome. The main reason is that Miranda has created an engaging, worldly and simply beautiful, both inside and out heroine with that of the so-called scandalous widow, Caroline Townsend. How I wish more authors of historical romance would write a heroine like Caro. She's a heroine of the first water, a survivor in a way, who can navigate through society and create her own waves. She also was married to man she loved deeply, and not once does she put down her marriage or her first husband even when she finds love again with the stuffy and self righteous, Thomas, Duke of Castleton. When these two meet, the sparks are explosive, but it takes some time before they can act on them, mainly because of Thomas who plans on courting and marrying Caro's cousin, the meek Anne. But the moment Thomas and Caro meet, poor Anne becomes a second thought to Thomas because Caro consumes his every waking moment.

Caro has a very positive outlook on life although she barely has two pennies to rub together. She and her husband, Robert eloped when they were far too young and Robert loved spending money. After his death, he left Caro with nothing. Caro is trying her best to keep her head above water, but her friends and acquaintances use her kind nature and basically bleed her dry because they are spendthrifts as well. Plus, Caro is a proud woman who won't take handouts. Since Caro's parents disowned her, she has no one to turn to and may have to become the mistress to some snobby rich lord in order to survive. When Thomas finds this out, he takes it upon himself to save Caro, and in turn, their relationship changes drastically. Thomas puts caution to the wind and accepts Caro and her alleged nefarious ways. Now the hardest part is trying to keep his libido for Caro in check because he wants to wait until they're married to be intimate. But since Caro wants Thomas desperately, and it's been so long since she's been with a man, she can't wait. Caro is very tenacious. Thomas doesn't stand a chance. As Thomas tries to keep his hands off Caro, some of her first husband's friends are looking for a unique portrait Caro may or may not have that could be sold for a great deal of money. Thomas trusts Caro, but figures out she's keeping some secrets. He'll try his best to have her reveal them to him so they can build a future together without any more unneeded drama.

The Importance of Being Wicked has so much fun going on! We have an experienced heroine with Caro who doesn't shy away from anything, and a beta type hero with Thomas who seems stuffy, but when Caro gets a hold of him, he lets out his inner hungry beast. Watching Thomas succumb to Caro is wonderful. There are times he walks into certain question situations regarding Caro that would make another man jealous or second guess what's going on. Thomas listens to Caro's explanations and accepts them because he trusts her. It's so refreshing for a change not to have the over the top miscommunication trope found time and again in historical romances. The love scenes are well done and Thomas and Caro have this connection that I couldn't get enough of. I loved how these two opposites attract and come together.

Any lover of historical romance, including Avon historical romance must read The Importance of Being Wicked. I ate this one up like an ice cream sundae and wanted more. Another winner from Miranda Neville.

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## **Malin says**

### **3.5 stars**

Thomas Fitzcharles, the Duke of Castleton, is everything that is proper and dignified. The Dukes of Castleton tend to marry wealthy ladies of impeccable pedigree to enhance their holdings and fortune with each new generation. Thomas' father was an exception, marrying for love, and it's clear to Thomas that their marriage was not a success. As such, he is determined to win the hand of the eminently proper and extremely wealthy Miss Anne Brotherton, who thanks to being her grandfather, the Earl of Camber's sole heir, is the best catch of the season. He's surprised when he discovers that the demure Miss Brotherton is currently residing with her cousin, Mrs. Caroline "Caro" Townsend, possibly the least proper woman Castleton has ever met.

Having been raised nearly in isolation on her grandfather's estate, and until recently meant to marry a cousin who died, Miss Brotherton delights in being able to trick her fusty old guardians and escape to her cousin Caro's house in London. Caro, who fell madly in love with the reckless Robert Townsend at 17 and eloped with him, was disowned by the family as a result. Her marriage to Townsend was tumultuous and before he died, her husband had gambled away not only his fortune, but left his young widow in considerable debt. It doesn't mean that Caro has stopped supporting local artists, throwing lavish parties and generally trying to shock and scandalise the members of the Ton. Anne loves spending time with the colourful and different

people she meets at Caro's, even though none of them seem to understand her passion for archaeology and ancient history. When Castleton arrives on their doorstep, to press his suit, Anne accepts that he will probably be exactly the sort of person her guardians want her to marry, but he doesn't really seem to have eyes for her whenever Caro is near. Could it be that "Lord Stuff" (a nickname given to Castleton by Caro) is more driven by his emotions than he previously thought?

This is my first Miranda Neville novel. I can't say I'm a huge fan of the cover, but let's face it, it's actually the exception rather than the rule if I actually like a historical romance cover these days. There was a lot to like about her writing. I enjoyed that Caro was a widow, who despite the fact that her husband eventually descended into drunkenness and gambling addiction, still fairly happily recalled her marriage and mourned for her husband. I liked that Caro literally gave no fucks about the opinions of her relatives or most of polite society, but kept entertaining her friends because they were the ones who'd been nice to her when she was cast out in the first place, I also thought she did a pretty good job as a chaperone for her cousin, who was in no way compromised while in her care, while also making sure that young Anne didn't die of boredom. Having the heroine be a widow, and not of the "we never consummated the relationship" variety that seemed far too common in some Old School romances, and one who's experienced real passion, but also real heartache (she lost her child) was refreshing. Sure, Caro's financial practises aren't exactly the most sensible, she should totally stop feeding every starving artist who falls across her doorstep and make sure she can pay her debts, but she's also refuses to prostitute herself by becoming some man's mistress just to get enough money to pay said debts either. She has morals and principles, even if they're not exactly what a lot of the people judging her would like.

Castleton was a bit of a bore, it's true, but the fact that he's so aware of that himself makes it less of a flaw and more something to pity him for. His father was clearly extremely strict and refused to let young Thomas have many friends or any fun. Castleton has been bred for duty first and foremost and even when he starts falling for Caro, his main worry is that if he doesn't marry the stupendously wealthy Anne Brotherton or some other heiress, he won't be able to provide suitable dowries for his younger twin sisters. It's nice to read a romance that acknowledges that Dukes too could be in need of money, not just because of their reckless youths of promiscuity and gambling (which seems to be a common past time for aristocratic heroes). He doesn't feel a twinge of attraction towards Anne, and her passionate interest in archaeology bores him silly, but he's still determined to do his duty towards his family and his estates. He gradually lightens up the more time he spends with Caro, and has the tremendous grace to apologise when he realises that he's in the wrong. He tries to fight his attraction to her as long as possible, seeing as he's officially courting her cousin, but once he gives in, he does his best to convince her that he loves her just the way she is, scandal and all, and apart from becoming a bit more sensible with money, doesn't want her to change.

The main thing that detracted from my full enjoyment of this book was a subplot involving an expensive painting that Caro had in her possession. Several of her husband's old friends, all involved in art collecting in some way, are extremely interested in getting their hands on it, by hook or by crook. Caro refuses to sell it, because it's the last thing she has left to properly remember her dead husband by. There was a lot of silly plotting by people, first to figure out if Caro actually had the stupid painting, and then to try to gain possession of it. I didn't care for it, one bit. As this is the first book in a series of four, *The Wild Quartet* being Robert Townsend and his notorious school friends, several supporting characters in this book go on to become main characters later in the series. It was due to extremely glowing reviews of the last two books in the series that I decided to start at the beginning, and I found it a very promising start.

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## ? Kimberly says

The Importance of Being Wicked reintroduces heroine, Caro. It share with us her story and that of Thomas, Duke of Castleton. Caro is now a widow and in dire straits thanks to her departed husband's love of the tables. While the first part of the book got off to a slow start, the second half swept me away. This is the first book in a four part series, dealing with badly behaving art collectors.

When the tale begins we met Caro and her posse of artist friends. She is beating the debt collectors from her door and getting ready to chaperone her cousin an heiress. The Duke of Castleton has set his hat on Caro's niece to replenish his families coiffures, but Caro is determined she have a love match. Both the Duke and Caro are surprised by the attraction they feel to each other. Caro would never submit to the role of Duchess and Thomas needs to follow family tradition and secure his family's wealth. The tale that unfolds was delightful and at times humorous.

Caro was a difficult character to connect to. While I admired her free will and sense of adventure, I had difficulty with her putting her cousin Anna in danger. She doesn't handle her finances very well and her friendships border on dangerous. I do think Thomas makes her a better person, and aids her in growing up. I had to remind myself that she went from her controlling mother to her wild youthful husband. Thomas the Duke of Castleton was refreshingly innocent. He follows the rules and is a dutiful son. He is struck by Caro's beauty and flirty personality. When it comes to the bedroom, he is surprisingly uneducated and it was an interesting twist to see the heroine teaching the hero! Anne the youngest of them was probably the most sensible and I really would like to read her story. Caro's artist friends are over the top and fascinating. I loved some of them and hated others. We have creepy collectors adding to the mix, which drove the plot.

The tale unfolded slowly for me, and between my feelings for Caro and the pace, I really did not get swept away until about halfway. Once that occurred, I got caught up in the tale and loved watching the romance unfold. I had some issues with characters and flow, but overall felt this was a good start to a new series. I enjoyed the art culture and the seedy sides we were introduced too. I adored the "Stuffy Duke" (Caro's nickname for Thomas) and would have liked a little more romance weaved into this lusty romance. I want to thank HarperCollins/Avon for providing this ARC in exchange for my unbiased review.  
Kimba the Caffeinated Book Reviewer

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## Elis Madison says

K, so now we follow Caro, the 17-y-o dimbo from The Second Seduction of a Lady, who eloped with the barely-out-of-puberty lothario wannabe Robert Townsend. Anybody who had any life experience could see it coming, right?

Yuh huh.

Robert died a year ago—but not before gambling away his considerable wealth. Caro has been trying to keep it together by selling off everything that isn't nailed down (except the Titian they bought on their honeymoon, which she tells people she doesn't have). One unusually aggressive debt collector is demanding more than money.

Caro's still not accepted in "polite" circles (Yeah, I wonder why they're called "polite," too, since they seem to be obsessed with being IMpolite). But she has steadfast friends among the artsy set.

Thomas is the Duke of Castleton. Ever since the first duke, the bastard of Charles II and his inamorata, the Castletons have held the title with pride. King Chuck didn't endow the title with any funds or lands, so the heirs to the duchy have added to its wealth by marrying well (well, until the last duke who married for "wuv")—and they've outlived the "history" of the title by keeping the name above reproach.

It's up to Thomas now, to marry well and set things right so that his sisters (the two his father didn't dower, hint, hint) have a decent dowry.

Thomas's father, on his deathbed, chose Anne Brotherton for Thomas. She comes with a lot of loot, and is quiet and proper. Perfect, in other words, for a man whose life revolves around duty and *the family name*.

When Thomas decides it's time to close the deal, Anne (whom he has never seen) is visiting her cousin (sorta) in London. He knocks on the door, and is surprised and pleased to meet his bride to be—who could ask for more, at least in the getting-of-heirs department?

Except the woman he's gawping at ain't his intended.

Art theft, a rescue that's more of an abduction, and other general pandemonium ensues. I'll give it 3.5.

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## Caz says

**... or maybe 3.5 stars, if I'm having a good day!**

A more appropriate – although less enticing – title for this book might have been *The Importance of Employing some Common Sense*, because there were times I really wanted to knock some into the heroine.

We first met Caro in the novella *The Second Seduction of a Lady*, which I enjoyed very much. During the course of that story she meets and elopes with Robert Townsend when she is just seventeen years old.

This book starts some seven years later; she is now a widow and in straightened circumstances, Robert having gambled away all their money. Her debts are mounting up and she has no way to pay them, yet she still keeps “open house” for her friends, who are quite happy to eat her out of house and home with no thought as to how she pays for the food and drink they consume.

Caro is what would probably, at the time, have been termed “fast”. She is vivacious and almost proud of the fact that she isn’t respectable (which is understandable in some ways, given the rigidity of society at that time), and she flouts convention, even when she is supposed to be acting as chaperone to her cousin.

There were times I felt some empathy for her, as her thoughtlessness and generally carefree attitude was

obviously just a front to cover for her anxieties and insecurities, and to stop her thinking about things she didn't want to think about. But at other times, I just wanted to yell at her to grow up, and to be fair, towards the end of the book, she realises she needs to do just that.

Our hero, Thomas, Duke of Castleton, nicknamed "Lord Stuff" certainly lives up to the epithet a lot of the time. He's very proper and has come to town with the intention of securing the hand of Caro's cousin, Anne, who is an heiress. Castleton owns a lot of land, but most of it is entailed, and he has sisters to provide for – his father having been rather profligate – and so he isn't particularly flush with cash, either.

So those are the two protagonists, and while I didn't dislike the story, I have to say that I found it hard to engage with either Caro or Thomas very much. Caro is immature and headstrong for the sake of being so, which lands her into hot water on several occasions. Thomas has a stick up his arse; and for all that he occasionally displays a dry sense of humour and, at times, a willingness to learn which is verging on adorable, he is a fairly bland hero.

Caro and Thomas fall almost immediately into lust with each other. That's not uncommon in romances, but I didn't really feel that we got to see the progression from lust to love. Thomas seems to suddenly decide he loves Caro, while for most of the book, Caro is honest enough with herself to admit she married Thomas for financial security and because she desperately wanted to sleep with him. It's only towards the end, following a tragic event that she begins to see his true worth and finally starts to grow up and put the past behind her; and from that point, I found I could like her. Grown-up Caro is capable, sensible and loving and will make an excellent duchess, and at last, the relationship between her and Castleton begins to become romantic rather than just sexual.

*The Importance of Being Wicked* was enjoyable enough despite my reservations about the main characters; but I'm not sure it's a book I'll revisit.

*With thanks to the publisher and Edelweiss for the review copy.*

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**D.G. says**

**DNFed at 9%**

Pretty quickly, this heroine drove me BUNKERS. First she's a thief - she owes people's money but it's hiding a valuable possession because it reminds her that her gambler of a dead husband "loved her once." For realz? You're not paying people who actually work for a living because you're being sentimental? Second, she decided she has to make the hero uncomfortable (the first time she met him) because she wants to convince herself that her cousin won't marry anybody who's "dull." Who told you that you can decide who your cousin marries? And what if she likes him "dull" as he is? I think that's way better than marrying a gambler who steals from poor people.

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