



Scandalous Ever After

Theresa Romain

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"Bounds with delightful characters...an entertaining collision of crossed purposes and mixed messages ensues."—*Publishers Weekly*

After years apart, old friends Lady Kate Whelan and Evan Rhys reunite at a race. They've been masking their feelings for each other for years, but when Evan must protect Kate from her late husband's secrets, he may not be able to resist her any longer.

After being widowed by a steeplechase accident in Ireland, Lady Kate Whelan abandons the turf. But once her mourning is complete, her late husband's debts drive her to seek help in Newmarket amidst the whirl of a race meet. There she encounters antiquities expert Evan Rhys, her late husband's roguish friend—whom she hasn't seen since the day of his lordship's mysterious death.

Now that fate has reunited them, Evan seizes the chance to win over the woman he's always loved. But once back within the old stone walls of Whelan House, long-held secrets come to light that shake up everything Kate thought she knew about her marriage. Now she wonders who she can trust with her heart—and Evan must decide between love and a truth that will separate him from all his heart desires.

Romance of the Turf Series:

A Gentleman's Game (Book 1)
Scandalous Ever After (Book 2)

Scandalous Ever After Details

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From Reader Review Scandalous Ever After for online ebook

Ginny Lurcock says

While it wasn't a bad book, it wasn't precisely a good book either. And I blame the word count. Had I been an editor for this novel, it would have been dripping with red ink by the time I was done. Not because of errors, but there were so many superfluous words. So many words.

Why are there so many words?

Honestly, a good fifty pages could've been cut and it would've been just fine. I wouldn't have such heavy eyelids. I might care a bit more about the story...

Because in the end, those extra words sapped my energy. I couldn't manage to care about Kate and Evan. There were just so many of the same words repeated over and over until it finally mattered and Evan abruptly changed tack and then they all changed right back for happily ever after.

So while the ending itself was cute and full of hope and more mystery, I just... *yawn* ...I need a nap.

Becca says

I read Scandalous Ever After as a buddy read with Andrea. Wow, the two of us are bad luck for each other...but at least we are in it together! :)

Anyway, I have LOVED some of Romain's work, but her most recent releases have been a huge disappointment for me. Gone are the gentle, purely character driven novels that have just the right amount of internal reflection to make them thoughtful without being slow with warm family settings and no needless drama. Lately, there has been too much internal thought, not enough communication, and needless angst to propel a story along.

Romain can definitely write, there is no doubt about that, which is why I keep trying again, but this book just couldn't keep my attention.

I believe Andrea's review captures fully how all the drama just became too much (she finished the novel whereas I stopped at about 60%).

In the opening chapter, I adored the hero, Evan. I liked that he seemed to battle depression of some sort, had a quirky sense of humor, and nursed a long-running love for his best friend's widow. There was so much potential there for a beta hero! But then, Evan proved to be an enormous pushover. It was pathetic. He had all these strong feelings and never vocalized anything. He was willing to have casual sexual encounters with Kate when she felt like it and he never actually told her how he felt (he does at the very end but too little too late). Kate is not much better. She complains about her situation but turns a blind eye to all the support she actually has. Her husband was not a good guy, but really, she proves herself time and again to be a selfish person who is blind to everything but what is convenient for her. And then she is upset that no one "knows" her or "sees" her even though I've seen the love she gets from her children, her siblings and father, and from

Evan. It was like both characters were emotionally stunted. And then there was drama galore and I couldn't take it anymore.

Despite this book's beautiful cover that I desperately wanted to keep on my shelf, I couldn't like this book. I couldn't care about the characters, I got frustrated with the lack of communication and growth, the sex scenes came out of nowhere, and the drama was endless.

I will not be reading Romain's newest series which also promises more of the same. Until I see reviews that point to romances like Romain's *It Takes Two to Tangle*, *My Scandalous Duke*, or *Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress*, I will be taking a break for a while.

Caz says

4.5 stars

This second full-length novel in Theresa Romain's *Romance of the Turf* series takes up the story of Kate Durham née Chandler, the elder Chandler daughter, widow of the Earl of Whelan and mother of two young children. **Scandalous Ever After** is the sort of strongly written, character-driven and emotionally satisfying romance at which this author excels, and there's a dash of mystery, too, which eventually turns out to be linked to one of the secondary plotlines featured in book one, **A Gentleman's Game**.

When Kate was just seventeen, she was swept off her feet by the handsome Conall Durham, and after a whirlwind courtship, married him and left England to live at his estate in Ireland. Con's best friend, Evan Rhys, a Welsh historian and archaeologist, was a frequent visitor, and the three of them spent many an evening together chatting, laughing and sampling the excellent local whiskey. Evan and Kate developed a strong and – they'd thought – lasting friendship, even though unbeknownst to Kate, Evan had fallen in love with her the moment they met. Over the years, Kate watched Con running up debts he couldn't pay and put up with his infidelities – and while Evan remonstrated with his friend, Con continued on his own merry way until he was killed as the result of a fall from his horse. Shortly before this, the two men argued violently, after which Evan left and has never returned; he and Kate haven't seen each other in the two years since Con's death.

Kate hasn't been home to Newmarket since she married, but she is back in England now, hoping to ask her father for help in settling the massive debt Connor left behind. While she's there, she attends a lecture on antiquities – and specifically, the way in which the collectors' market is currently being inundated with fakes – given by her old friend Evan Rhys. She has been hurt by his continued absence from her life and hopes they can regain something of their former friendship, unaware of the true nature of his feelings for her and that he harbours some guilt about the argument he and Con had on the day he died. Evan is surprised to see Kate, but can't deny that he's missed her – and decides to woo her now that she is free and out of mourning. But he knows it won't be easy; over the years Kate has placed him in the role of "dependable friend" and he'll have to take things slowly if he is to get her to see him as a lover.

Unfortunately for Kate, Sir William is unable to help her with her financial woes, so she decides to return to Ireland and Evan offers to escort her, telling her that he wants to look into the sudden flood of fake antiquities that appear to have been made from stone that comes from close to the Whelan estate. Once

there, it becomes apparent that not only does Evan have cause for his suspicions but also that Con's death was no accident - and that the machinations of the mysterious villain who cast a long shadow in the previous book continue to pursue the Chandler family, although to what end is not yet apparent.

Scandalous Ever After is a skilfully blended story of romance and mystery, with the focus very firmly on the fragile new relationship that Kate and Evan are building together. They have terrific chemistry and their many verbal exchanges are witty, funny and utterly delightful; such naturalistic dialogue is one of this author's strengths, and it's much in evidence here as Kate and Evan flirt, argue and tease their way towards a new understanding of themselves and each other. That's not to say it's an easy journey for either of them, especially after Kate takes a leap of faith and invites Evan to her bed - and almost immediately regrets her decision, because she is scared that by changing the nature of their relationship she will lose his friendship, and she couldn't bear that. Over the years, she has become so many different women – wife, mother, countess, manager - that she has lost sight of herself and her own wants and needs. Spending time with her family - and with Evan's on the way to Ireland (no matter that both families are very, very different) - has brought into sharp focus the fact that she doesn't really fit in anywhere, not in Ireland and not at home; and if she loses Evan's friendship she will be truly alone. She tells him she wants them to forget their one night together and go back to the way things were – and can't understand why Evan doesn't agree it's for the best, and why he eventually begins to pull back from her.

Evan is a gorgeous beta hero; an intellectual who can crack a dirty joke along with the best of them and whose concern and love for Kate shines through in his words and actions. He's kind, charming and perceptive, but his upbringing by a mother who constantly belittled him has left him a little emotionally bruised and he's suffered bouts of depression throughout his life – something Kate tackles superbly, offering understanding, compassion and acceptance.

The love story is beautifully nuanced and the love scenes are sensual as we see Evan and Kate tentatively exploring the possibilities for more than friendship at the same time as they fear to take the steps that will irretrievably change things between them. It's true that Evan is now more willing to put his heart on the line while Kate struggles with the fear that she could lose him and allows that fear to push her to retreat from him and from what she really wants; and there were times this reader found Kate's reticence just a teeny bit frustrating. Yet in the two years since Con's death, Evan allowed his fear of rejection to keep him far away from the temptation Kate presented, so he, too, has been guilty of running from his deepest desires.

My one complaint about the story overall is that Kate's inability to realise why Evan is so hurt when she wants to 'go back to how things were' goes on a little too long - and it's hard to believe she can really be so obtuse about it when he has been her closest friend for so many years. That point knocked my final grade down a little, but didn't spoil my enjoyment of the book and isn't going to prevent my recommending **Scandalous Ever After** to others.

Em says

Evan has pined for Kate since the moment they met - when his best friend Con introduced her as his wife. Kate has longed for Evan almost as long.

When the story opens, Con is dead and it's been two years since Kate and Evan have seen each other. But in the middle of a lecture Evan is giving about antiquities, something stirs the hairs on the back of his neck. When a woman's voice shouts out a question, he recognizes it instantly as Kate's. Kate never understood why

Evan fled Ireland after Con's death - and stayed away. Visiting her family in England, she heard Evan Rhys was giving a lecture, and she had to go. Kate remains behind after the lecture ends, and it's clear from the moment they set eyes on one another, their affection for each other is unchanged.

That first conversation is charged - Evan's absence has weighed on both of them - but their friendship, affection for each other and witty banter picks up as if they were never apart. Before long, they've made plans to remain together through Kate's return home to Ireland.

I loved this friends to lovers romance so much more than I thought I would. Kate is prickly, sensitive and bewildered by the strength of her love and affection for Evan. But she never thought she could have him - after all, he was Con's best friend and she was his husband. When he vanished after Con's death, she despaired but hoped he would one day find his way home to her in Ireland. Evan is charming, sweet and kind -and also plagued with depression. He fell in love with Kate and struggled with his feelings during their marriage, but when Con died - shortly after they argued - he blamed himself for his death. When they reunite after his lecture, both want more from the relationship.

Scandalous Ever After unfolds as Kate and Evan slowly forge a new partnership. It's one step forward, two steps back the whole way through - but what an entertaining and romantic trip it is. Kate and Evan are intensely attracted to one another and have great chemistry. I particularly loved their verbal exchanges - whether joking, flirting, arguing, or trying to confess their deepest, darkest secrets - and they're a highlight of the novel. Secondary characters are also well done, and even this 'children don't belong in romance novels' cynic loved the interplay between Kate and her children, and Evan and the children. Evan is such a terrific match for Kate and I fell hard for this flawed and wonderful character. Plagued by bouts of depression - 'when the gray descends' - and doubts about his relationship to Kate, he's a sensitive, charming foil to an intense, confused and tender Kate. They bring out each other's best and Ms. Romain does a terrific job translating their affection from the page.

There's A LOT going on outside of the relationship between Evan and Kate. Smuggling, illegitimate children, mistresses, criminal masterminds and their not-as-sharp lackey's...Ms. Romain keeps readers busy (and entertained) as she artfully balances the romance and the mystery that brings Evan and Kate together - FINALLY. Con's past casts a long shadow...and really, though Ms. Romain does an admirable job trying to convince us he wasn't a totally bad guy (he was a good dad and friend to Evan), I'm not a Con-vert. (ha!) I didn't like him, his behavior or his past shenanigans.

I hadn't read the novella or novel that preceded this one in the *Romance of the Turf* series, but you better believe I picked them up as soon as I finished this one. **Scandalous Ever After** is romantic, funny and charming and wonderful. So good.

Gina says

DNF at chapter 12.

I'm sure at some point in history, I've DNF'd other historical romance novels. I can't remember a single one right now. They're like pizza - even when they're bad they're still pretty good. There's nothing bad or offensive or particularly wrong with this one except that I had reached chapter 12 and absolutely nothing significant had happened. I didn't care about the characters, the plot, nor reading another 50% of the book to reach the HEA. It was just so bland. I may try it again someday when my mood shifts, but until then just no.

Andrea says

Buddy read with Becca ! It seems like we're cursed at the moment. We seem to be picking all the wrong books lately :(

Anyways...

Having enjoyed the first book in the series and being disappointed by Romain's latest book, I was eager to see if it was me or if her latest book are just not my thing. Sadly, it seems it's the latter.

What bothered me most about this book was that I just couldn't feel the chemistry. Evan has been in love with his best friend's wife ever since he met her when they were teenagers. He never said anything to her, and once stuff happened that made him argue with his best friend, he left the country and never spoke to Kate again for years. Now she's a widow though, Evan has decided to pursue the only woman he has ever loved.

Thing is, in the beginning, my heart broke for Evan. He was a bit pathetic, but his feelings I could emphasize with. Kate on the other hand, was infuriatingly oblivious, and strung Evan along far too long for my liking. He was in love with her for years, and the first chance of an affair, he jumps her (in what I found a very mechanical, detached sex scene) and then sort of just continues being friends with her as if nothing happened. He does stand up to her at some point, but given that she doesn't really react to that (view spoiler), I wasn't exactly a big fan of hers. Yes, I know, she's a widow, has to kids, inherited staggering debts from her husband (and btw, who decided that HR characters can't have a decent first partner? Why does there always have to be something that makes it "ok" for them to move on and find love for the first time with someone new??), and all that. But honestly... Sorry, rant over. Where was I? Oh yes. She then even has the nerve to (view spoiler). So yeah. I wasn't exactly invested in their relationship.

And then there was the drama. I admit this book lost a lot of potential stars from me because of my severe allergy to contrived drama (think smuggling, mistresses, near-death experiences, a possible murder...) but honestly, there was much too much here for my liking (which really doesn't take much, so don't mind me). It made me skim most of the second half because it was just one thing after another that pulled the focus away from their relationship.

I'm still not ready to give up on this author (she has written some books I thoroughly enjoyed after all), but... I expected more :(((

Tracy Emro says

I am voluntarily leaving a review for an eARC provided to me by NetGalley and the publisher

Maybe 3.5 stars

Kate, the Countess of Whelan and Evan Rhys have a history. Evan has been in love with Kate since the day

he met her - as the bride of his best friend. The three of them shared a deep friendship - but all that changed when Kate's husband Con died in a racing accident.

Evan left shortly before Con died, after they had a heated argument. Evan finally gave in to his anger of the way Con treated Kate and his responsibilities. He left never intending to return.

Two years later, Kate is back in England trying to secure a loan to pay off her late husband's debts and to save her son's legacy. She learns that Evan is lecturing not far from her families home and she seeks him out. Evan has been fighting depression his entire life and Kate seems to be the only person that keeps the "gray" from consuming him. He has stayed away for the last two years because he feels unworthy and guilty. But seeing Kate again smashes all his reasons for staying away. He has been trying to find the source of forgeries used to smuggle and Kate's appearance is the perfect excuse to return to Ireland.

They try to pick up their friendship where they left off, but there are things that need to be said and feelings that need to be explored. When they take their relationship to the next level, Kate immediately regrets it - even though she instigated the interlude. Kate wants things with Evan to be like they were and can't understand his withdrawal from her.

They return to Ireland and begin to investigate the forgeries and their feelings for each other. Each of them learns some hard truths and begin to come to terms with the changes between them.

When Evan's life is in peril - Kate finally acknowledges her true feelings and lets go of her fears and past hurts.

I liked the story, but I didn't love it. The writing felt a bit disjointed and was at times confusing to follow. Although, I was impressed with the author's portrayal of Evan - his unrequited love for Kate, his guilt over Con, his struggle with depression and his refusal to accept a half-life with Kate - it was really well done and completely believable.

All in all a decent read and I would be happy to recommend it to others.

Kate says

Much as it bums me out to say this, I didn't like this book. it was stilted and boring and the plot wasn't even HALF baked, considering we don't get into it until 3/4 of the way through the damn book. And there were no real stakes in the romance. Evan has loved Kate since they met and has never told her. And...he never really does. He tells the reader. It's every page implied to Kate, but never declared. He tiptoes around his feelings and prevaricates and, even when he DOES tell her, he doesn't TELL her. He doesn't explain the history of his feelings or why he left for two years without a word or...any of it. And it was FRUSTRATING because this book desperately needed that confrontation. Especially because these characters were just so...bland. There was nothing really to them. I didn't get their true motivations because I felt like they kept changing and neither of them had much to their personalities. I'm told they're witty and charming, and in some scenes I saw it, but overall I didn't FEEL it.

It's easy to backseat drive someone else's book, but if this were me I'd have skipped the entire beginning with

Kate's family. I'd have Evan showing up to Ireland to investigate the stone issue (bringing the plot to the start of the book) and not telling Kate and having her find out about it second hand. I'd have the confrontation about why he left earlier. I'd have them ARGUE some, and be MAD at each other and feel their own guilt more. Then let the passion and romance grow from there instead of the vanilla, matter-of-fact sex we weirdly got. And I'd have let things play out with regard to the other secrets and the mystery from there, because then there'd be time for it to DO something. There'd be tension. There'd be stakes. There'd be SOMETHING to make me want to keep turning the pages. Not to mention the fact that I'd do something with the Irish setting. It should have been a character in itself and it wasn't at all. This book could have been set anywhere.

Blah. That's all I can say about this and it breaks my heart a little because I really, really enjoyed the previous book in this series and thought the introductory novella was a delight. I generally feel that way about all of Theresa Romain's books, in fact. But this one just fell totally flat for me. 1.5 stars, really.

Oh. And just for the record. This is ANOTHER book in this series that doesn't match the blurb. Yes, Kate goes to Newmarket to ask her father for money, but that scene is straight-forward and takes about half a page. And Kate isn't surprised about anything in her marriage; she knew what was up for much of it. She doesn't think her husband's death is mysterious at all. (And, as I said above, they don't consider this possibility until over 3/4 of the way in). Evan might be a bit of a scamp, but never a rogue. And as I whined about above, the secret of his feelings never REALLY comes to light, and certainly not in a dramatic fashion.

herdys says

I'll add Evan to the list of my awesome Theresa Romain's heroes. What a sweetheart!

Mary - Buried Under Romance says

Scandalous Ever After is one of the best friends-to-lovers story I have ever read, and features an incredibly sweet hero in the form of Evan Rhys, who has loved our beloved heroine, Lady Kate Whelan, for 13 years and ongoing. There is something magical in a wonderful tale of self-understanding, forgiveness, and finally pays homage to that fact that true friends really do know one better than oneself. There is also a blend of mystery in the novel - a continuation of a villain's schemes from the past Romance of the Turf books - leading us tantalizingly to the grand finale in Kate's brother's story...but alas, this book is not about him, but rather Kate and Evan.

The first time Evan met his friend Con's seventeen-year-old bride, Kate, he had fallen heads over heels in love. His love never dulled, yet for his consideration, he hid his feelings and remained a kind family friend, knowing in part that Con was undeserving of Kate. His unrequited love continued even when he left after Con's accidental death, and Kate was left to pick up the pieces of her heart and family, shouldering the financial and emotional burdens for her young children. Yet, a chance encounter brings these old friends back together again, and this time, neither seems willing to let each other go.

Typically, in a book, one side of the characters will shine brighter than the other, and we call it a "hero/heroine-centric story." In this book, as with Mrs. Romain's pensive pen, both Evan and Kate get their time to shine, and they do so equally bright. We initially might pity Evan as this incredibly nice guy who has nursed a hidden love for his best friend's wife (who became his best friend) for years, because Kate was

oblivious to them when she was married. Yet, when these emotions are dug deeper, the whys of Evan's love, and his fear of confessing to Kate, goes back to his own upbringing, and the shadows of his dreams and fears. As for Kate, it seemed that she was heartbroken when Con died, but instead she was nursing the wounds from his infidelity for years, and even more unwilling to trust another again, more so to love. Ultimately, in what begins as a simple and wonderful reunion of friends, we get past a mere glimpse of these characters into their experience-shaped selves, marking the conclusion of Evan's unrequited love of 13 years all the more poignant.

"You are not perfect, Kate. But you are just right." (Loc 838/3136)

We see, in the end, that they are perfect for each other, just as a romance novel should make one feel. Once again, I applaud Mrs. Romain for creating such a riveting piece of utopia in my corner of the world, splashing a bit of color into the grayness of my world. (Inside reference ;-))

*ARC received via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

Carole (Carole's Random Life in Books) says

This review can also be found at Carole's Random Life in Books.

I really enjoyed this book! This is the first book by Theresa Romain that I have had the chance to read and it ended up being a great one. This book is listed as the second book in the Romance on the Turf series but it can be read fine as a stand alone novel. Once I really got hooked by the story, I didn't want to put this book down. I kept sneaking peeks throughout the day and before you knew it, I had reached the end of the story.

Kate and Evan are the focus of this story. Kate became a widow two years ago when her husband died in an accident. She is working to take care of the debts left by her husband. Evan was Kate's husband's best friends. They consider each other friends as well but Evan fought with Con just prior to his death and has stayed away since his passing. Kate and Evan cross paths at one of his lectures and they decide to travel together.

I liked Kate and Evan together. They have been friends for a very long time and know a lot about each other but quickly learn that not everything is as they had thought. I really liked the fact that they were a bit older and seemed more mature than a lot of couples featured in romantic novels. Kate has been married and is the mother of two children. They both had a lot of respect for each other and were willing to stand up for themselves when needed. I thought the chemistry between them was wonderfully done and their banter was a lot of fun.

I really liked the way the story flowed. Since Kate and Evan spend a lot of the book traveling, we get to see them in several different environments. Kate's family were so much fun and I loved how Evan seemed to fit in perfectly. Evan's family were in dramatic contrast and it was fun to see them interact. Once the pair arrived at Kate's estate, I enjoyed the way they were with the children and Con's mother. The secondary characters really added to the overall story.

I would recommend this book to fans of historical romance. This was a heartwarming romance that was a lot of fun to read. I can't wait to read more of Theresa Romain's works in the future.

I received an advance reader edition of this book from Sourcebooks Casablanca via NetGalley.

Initial Thoughts

I really enjoyed this! Kate and Evan had wonderful chemistry and I loved their banter. The story was just a lot of fun.

Mariana says

I enjoyed books 1 and 2 equally. Now I am going to go back and read The Sport Of Baronets.

eyes.2c says

Old hurts and new mysteries exposed!

Certainly this Romance of the Turf story took a different direction. Old yearnings, death and mysteries play out between Wales and Ireland.

Lady Kate Whelan was widowed when her husband was killed in a steeplechase race. She's the daughter of a Welsh racing baronet, Sir William Chandler. Kate had been married to an Irish Lord, Conall Ritchie Durham, the late fifth Earl of Whelan. Con's best friend was a Welshman, the laconic, humorous Evan Rhys, a noted antiquities expert. I loved Romain's turn of phrase, such as when she described how Evan and Con first met and the pranks they got up to. As Con states, it was from a 'trellis of such events ... did their friendship cling and grow.'

Evan has been in love with Kate since he first met her. They had been the best of friends. Evan however has not seen Kate since Conall died, two years ago. He blames himself for Con's death.

I enjoyed Evan's wry, self separating burst of humour and the way Kate responded in kind. I enjoyed his conversations with himself with regard to Kate.

The hurt of Evan's retreat and of Kate's puzzlement to that action lies between them. 'Con's death had [indeed] changed many things.'

Returning to Ireland with Kate prior to leaving for Greece, errant thoughts and emotions previously tamped down rise to the surface.

Horses do play a part in this story, although the plot line takes off into unexpected places. They are more a back drop to the action. Action that unfolds into old grievances and revenge.

The tension and connections between these Kate and Evan are well played and all results in an excellent read.

A NetGalley ARC

Amanda says

"She had come to think of love as flashing and bright, plummeting and intense. The falling star, not the earth on which it landed.

As grief took many forms, so did love, its happy twin. It came in disguise, behind the face of a friend. It spoke with a familiar voice. It shared her heart by adding to it, a bounty she had

never expected. “**I love you**,” she said.”

Bare me with through this review if you please, because I’ve found it difficult to put into coherent words just how much I loved Scandalous Ever After. THANKGOD I loved it too as I was beginning to doubt Theresa Romain, especially after her previous book and novella were not up to her typical brilliant standards, in my humble opinion. There were no such worries with this book. I compare reading Scandalous to drinking a cup of the best kind of hot chocolate; you know, the uber rich and frothy kind, with extra whipped cream! The kind you have to drink *ever so slowly* in order to savor each and every drop? Likewise, I found myself reading this book *very carefully*, as if to take in and absorb every word, every turn of phrase and little detail I might have ordinarily missed if I sped read through it as I normally would have. But Evan and Kate demanded that I take my time with their story. So that’s exactly what I did.

The book begins with a reunion between old friends. But as with any Theresa Romain story, there is much more going on beyond the surface pleasantries. Evan Rhys is an antiquities expert and at one time, best friend to Lady Kate Whelan’s late husband, Con, and equally dear friend to Kate herself as well. It’s been two years since Con’s death and two years since Evan and Kate have seen or heard from each other for reasons unknown, at least unknown to Kate. This was the point in the setup where I started yelling because **PINING HERO HOPELESSLY IN LOVE WITH HIS BEST FRIEND’S WIDOW!!!!** It was basically a catnip parade from that moment forward.

I LOVED EVAN. He was the reason I created my ‘sweetheart heroes’ shelf in the first place. Evan was kind, funny, charming, caring, sensitive and selfless, that last one to a disheartening degree at times. He felt things deeply, which is probably why his pining and longing skills made my heart break on multiple occasions. And the way he loved Kate, *oh god*. It physically hurt to see and feel his hurt, as he was convinced Kate would never see him as anything more than a friend and yet at the same time, he couldn’t bear the idea of being apart from her again. And every single time Kate gave him hope, only to rip it away again, I was devastated for him, for both of them. You know those characters that if you could, you’d literally wrap your arms around them and never let them go? That was Evan to me.

And then, there was Kate. She was the type of character I could see others finding difficult to like at times. But I for one loved her, in spite of and because of her flaws. Why? Because her flaws made her much more tangible and human, as opposed to an idealistic sort of perfection she tried so hard to portray to others. It’s made obvious early on though just why Evan fell so hard for this incredible woman. She possessed a resilient type of strength that saw her through her late husband’s many infidelities, spendthrift ways and other betrayals that would’ve left most people in ruins. But not Kate. She was a fighter. And no matter how dire her circumstances, she kept on fighting, not just for herself, but for her young children, Nora and Declan, as well. She was quite handy with a pistol too which is always a huge plus for me when it comes to heroines.

Sadly, the greatest stumbling block in Evan and Kate’s path to happiness resided in Kate’s completely justified, although equally frustrating, fear of change. For so long, Kate had done all the taking care of, be it her children or the estate, it was she and she alone that saw to everyone else’s needs and comfort. Because she shouldered everything alone, allowing herself to become vulnerable to anyone was simply not an option. Considering the tragically unexpected nature of her husband’s death, and the mountains of debt and disaster he left behind in his wake, it’s no surprise that Kate was wary to risk losing even more, most specifically her heart. Evan understood all of this and he respected Kate’s feelings for as long as possible, even in detriment to his own wellbeing. But I must say that the moment Evan had it out with Kate, AT LAST coming clean about loving her and wanting her to be his own and wanting to give himself wholly and freely to her in return, it was remarkable. Because FINALLY, Evan saw his own worth and it was thereafter in Kate’s hands

whether or not their connection, which was solidly built on friendship and respect that had later grown into mutual attraction, understanding and yes, LOVE, was worth taking a chance on.

“Why can’t we go on like this? Enjoying each other for the time we have?”

“As I said, because I want more than a half measure of you. And I deserve someone who wants more than a half measure of me.”

I have to say, in spite of all the pining on Evan’s side and stubbornness on Kate’s end, their romance was really quite lovely when it came right down to it. I just loved, I don’t know, the *ease* of their relationship. They were so comfortable together, sharing a natural chemistry that was immediate and potent. I especially enjoyed their saucy banter and how well they complimented each other. Oh there was plenty of passion as well, which grew in intensity with every moment they shared. And I never once doubted that they were meant to be. I often imagined Kate and Evan as having an invisible string connected to their hearts, and no amount of separation or obstacles would see that string severed. Cheesy imagery I know, but quite accurate nonetheless.

“I won’t fall away from you,” Evan said. Six words, standing in for all the words in his heart.

He had always been hers.

“I know you won’t. And I won’t either.”

Something else I thought Theresa handled with care was Evan’s bouts of depression, or what we today would classify as depression.

“...the gray feeling hovered. It waited, always, for the inactivity that meant a gap in his armor. Then it sank upon him, dissolving certainty into questions. What should I have done? Why did that happen? What if I had done this? What will happen next? What will I do if? Until the very acts of everyday living took on a weight so great as to make them impossible.”

That passage, and others like it, struck me as profound and important because depression is real, even if it’s unseen and belittled by those who have never experienced it. Representations like this go a long way in combating the negative stigma of mental illness so, well done Ms. Romain.

I also liked that Kate’s husband Con was never portrayed as the outright ‘villain’ of the story. Yes he wasn’t a terribly good person, nor did he deserve Kate or Evan’s unshakable loyalty, but even so, his characterization was not black and white and I appreciated that. In fact, I liked what it says about Evan and Kate as characters themselves. Even though their love for this deeply flawed man led them down a path of inherent heartbreak and disappointment, they never wished he hadn’t been a part of their lives. If not for Con, Kate and Evan never would’ve met, yet alone fallen in love. They accepted what the hands of fate had dealt them and were made stronger because of it, which later them towards creating a better, brighter future, *together* this time.

The close knit bonds Kate and Evan shared with the adorable Whelan children and the appearances by the horse mad Chandler family were notable standouts as well. I can’t wait for Kate’s twin brother Jonah’s book next as *I think* it should be a second chance romance involving him and his estranged wife. My catnip senses are tingling just thinking about it.

Gosh, what else can I say? I know I’m probably forgetting loads of other wonderful things to prattle on about

and I'll probably kick myself over it later but to sum it all up, THIS BOOK WAS AMAZING. I loved every page of it and I cannot recommend it highly enough. Go read it! NOW.

Erin Kelly says

This was my first book by Theresa Romain, and I was pleasantly surprised at her different take on historical romance. With a great friends-to-lovers trope, a delicious hero, and different settings than most historicals, this one is definitely worth checking out.

The Story-

Evan and Kate are old friends whose relationship ended at the sudden death of her husband a few years ago. Kate has been struggling to put the pieces of her life back together, and Evan has been desperately trying to move forward...and forget about his feelings for Kate. When she seeks him out, they have to figure out who they are to each other now.

My Thoughts-

I loved how different this book was from all of the cookie-cutter historical romances I (admittedly) love to read. First, the backdrops of the horse racing and Anglesey in Wales provided interesting interactions for the characters. Secondly, I have never been a horse person, but I really enjoyed reading about the horses in this book. It's obvious that the author loves them and can transmit that appeal to the reader. Don't get me wrong: this book isn't all about horses or anything, it just effortlessly connects them to the story through the couple's affinity for them. Lastly, I thought the grown-up approach to this romance was refreshing. These are two adults who have figured some things out and can move forward with eyes wide open.

The best thing about this book, however, is the hero. I loved Evan so much that at some points, I disliked the heroine based on her idiocy with regards to him. Hello!?! Here is a hot, amazing guy who adores you. There was also a bit of a disjointedness with the plot once they got to Ireland and started a murder investigation. It almost felt like two separate books.

The Bottom Line-

The overarching mystery which continues from this book, while interesting, has me less intrigued to come back to the series than Romain's character development and welcome take on historical romance. I thoroughly enjoyed this read and highly recommend it, especially to fans of horses and well-developed characters and relationships (not instalove). 4 stars
