



The Highest Stakes

Emery Lee

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WHAT WOULD YOU WAGER FOR LOVE?

In the high stakes gentleman's world of 18th century horseracing, when the blood of the "desert kings" ruled the English turf, a hero returns from war to claim the girl he has loved since he first spied her riding hell-for-leather over the Doncaster heath. Determined to have her at any cost, he will risk everything.

A story of star-crossed lovers and horseracing, THE HIGHEST STAKES transports the reader to 18th century England, an era infamous for corruption, arranged marriages, and high stakes gambling; when racing and breeding became the obsession of the uppermost elite, and a match race might replace a duel in settling a point of honor.

Through the fictional love story of Robert Devington and Charlotte Wallace, a tale of drama, danger, thwarted love, and retribution unfurls...

The Highest Stakes Details

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From Reader Review The Highest Stakes for online ebook

Emery Lee says

THE HIGHEST STAKES - commentary author Emery Lee

Since THE HIGHEST STAKES' release, I have done a number of guest blogs to answer questions about my creative process, why I chose Georgian England and Colonial Virginia as my settings, and how I researched the novel. I also wrote about the history of horseracing and my own passion for equines. I would now like share some of these thoughts and add some background information on the novel itself.

It is always said that one should write one's passions. In my case, this would mean converging horses, history and romance, elements that at first glance appear very much at odds, but the combination, to me, was irresistible. I wanted to create a hero, (Robert Devington) who would overcome many obstacles to find love and happiness, with his ultimate fate hanging on a horse race.

A story of star-crossed lovers and horseracing, THE HIGHEST STAKES transports the reader to the hard-drinking, vice-ridden, horseracing world of Georgian England. Fascinating and titillating, this was an era of corruption, arranged marriages, and high stakes gambling; when racing and breeding became the obsession of the uppermost elite, and a match race might replace a duel in settling a point of honor. It was also an age in which a powerful and privileged aristocracy used an outer façade of honor and politesse to cover its multifarious sins.

My research in this endeavor was both extensive and diverse, going back to the early 18th century and the creation of the Thoroughbred itself. The horses (all progeny of the Byerley Turk, and the Darley and Godolphin Arabians) are seamlessly woven into the plot in which the success of Sir Garfield's racing stud is elemental to his schemes of social advancement, and a racing wager becomes the only pathway Devington sees to win his true love, Charlotte.

Charlotte Wallace is a young girl who is orphaned and forced to live with uncaring and socially ambitious relatives. Lonely and neglected, she seeks solace within her uncle's racing stables where she meets the young man with whom she share's what will become her lifelong passion- racehorses.

The young and ambitious Robert Devington is a lowly, but talented stable groom, who leaves his employ for the military in order to better himself in the eyes of Charlotte's uncle. After some time passes, Robert returns to claim Charlotte's hand in any way possible, ultimately leading to a racing wager that sets the plot in motion.

Through the fictional love story of Robert Devington and Charlottte Wallace, a tale of drama, danger, thwarted love, and retribution unfurls...

Enjoy the ride!

Emery Lee

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Mason Canyon says

The love of all things equine first drew me to Emery Lee's debut novel, "The Highest Stakes."

The author's ability to spin a story keep me entranced between the covers of this moving historical romance. "The Highest Stakes" is set in England during the mid-18th century. At that time, horseracing was a gentleman's sport catering to the society of nobility.

This is the story of forbidden love, greed, hatred, revenge, and retribution with a good dose of history mixed in.

The story focuses on star-crossed lovers Charlotte Wallace and Robert Devington. After being orphaned at age 13, Charlotte goes to live with her uncle, Sir Garfield Wallace, and his family. There she meets Robert, a stable boy in her uncle's employ.

Robert teaches Charlotte to ride and their love of horses, as well as for each other, blossoms. But their love is never meant to be it seems. No matter what Robert does to prove his love and worth, Charlotte's uncle will not hear of their union. He is willing to sacrifice Charlotte's happiness for a better status in social standings.

Author Emery Lee takes the reader on a journey of twists and turns, of highs and lows, and love and betrayal. Ever present in the backdrop is thoroughbred horseracing. From beginning to end, the author keeps you guessing and wanting for more.

You don't have to be a horse lover or race enthusiast to enjoy this book. The story is written in the language of 18th century England. For the reader unaccustomed to reading the language it takes a little bit to get familiar with. However, once the reader does they find it adds so much flavor to the story and puts them in that era.

From beginning to end, author Emery Lee has a blueblood winner with "The Highest Stakes."

Deborah says

"Set against the sights, sounds, and excitement of the brand new sport of thoroughbred racing. "The Highest Stakes" is a story of drama, love, and retribution in a world where pedigree is everything and fortunes can be won and lost in the blink of an eye."

"From the first day she learned to ride, Charlotte Wallace lived for the freedom that comes from tearing across the heath on one of her uncle's prized stallions. But that freedom is shattered when her uncle makes her the pawn in his bet on a high stakes horse race."

These are the cover descriptions of Emery Lee's extraordinary book, "The Highest Stakes." I'm never one to explain the story of a book, since that's something easily found on the covers or with a nod to the summaries already written. My goal as a reviewer is to tell more about the author's abilities to convey that story, and to give a personal sense of how it translates to the reader.

"The Highest Stakes," is a book that I took a risk on reading. I'm not one who knows horses. Having been

completely in the dark about them, I've never grown to appreciate their history or people's attachments to them. But, when I saw Emery Lee's book, it seemed like a good time to jump in and try to see this side of things. I started reading with a jaded mind...I didn't expect to finish the book.

Surprisingly enough, I was mesmerized! Ms. Lee writes about horses, races, breeding horses, and riders as if these things were at the heart of all life. It is captivating! I learned so much about the history of horse racing. The breeding of horses and how they develop a racing horse was so interesting written from Emery's hand, and the training of a race horse became alive and almost sensual. My heart raced when the races were described!

Emery Lee is a highly articulate, intelligent writer. She has an infinite grasp of the English language of the times in which her book takes place and of the entire setting of her story. Her characters are subtle and strong. They are absorbing in their truthfulness and honesty, and their love of horses. There is a love story at the heart of this novel; however, it is beautifully balanced with the story of the horses as they are entwined.

This is an intelligent book. It is a book to be taken seriously. A book that will teach and thrill, I recommend it especially to those who know and love horses and English stories of the 1700's.

Rane says

We're off to the races with the epic romantic adventure: *The Highest Stakes*, and when I say epic, I really mean epic, the novel spanning over the years as two lovers fight to be together and are torn apart by the greed of others and finally reunited after going through hell and back, but their love was ever constant and strong.

The stakes are none so higher when it comes to love and horse racing with the cast of characters sharing the spotlight at one time or another, but none so much as Robert and Charlotte. Robert Devington a groom and Charlotte the niece of Sir Garfield are truly in love and have been for a long time, and to prove himself Robert puts his neck out time and again to prove his worth to Sir Garfield, so he must marry Charlotte, but no matter what he does Sir Garfield turns down or somehow foils any marriage between the two lovers. After so many plans that failed, this doesn't stop Robert or Charlotte from believing and hoping that one day they will be together. Through the story, Robert is the constant hero, sometimes brash but never unkind, he loves deeply, that it pains the reader when his plans fall apart to somehow make Charlotte his wife, from being a groom, to becoming a soldier, then facing even death Robert never gives up his dreams and later revenge on those whom have done him wrong. Charlotte is strong, but not a feisty heroine, whom not only believes in Robert, but a horsewoman beyond her time. These two fight a lot of pains to be together one again. And even with the big misunderstanding that tears them apart for awhile, and am not a fan at all of the Big Mis, Emery Lee made it work smoothly.

Much of the book not only revolves around the lives of Robert and Charlotte and those whom they know and family, but around horses and horse racing. Now am going to be upfront, am not one whose big of horses, oh I love horses and had three amazing horses whom I cared and loved (never did ride, as they were more pets and pals) and the author does focus a lot of the book on the history of horses and horse racing at the time, that could become very tedious at times. But as I started to really read I noticed Emery Lee using the horses and horse racing as a sort of metaphor for what was or are going to happen to the characters. From the underdog winner to the steadiness and quiet strength in a cavalry horse but also in the soldier whose riding into battle. I thought this was cleverly done, that instead of skimming, I tended to pay attention to these races.

Like a true race, with the hooves pounding the turf, the crowd cheering on their favorite this book never let up in it's pace, and kept you guessing. Some books are very predictable that the reader feels their going backward then forward, this book is never predictable, far from it, you never know what going to happen. Nothing ends up the way you think it would, and I early on fool myself into thinking I knew what was going to happen, and that was nip in the bud real quick.

Along with the unpredictably of the story, the characters were also shown in black and white and also in deep shades of grey. While some characters were driven by love others were driven by greed and lust. Philip Drake for example only thinks about one thing himself, and is out to get his heiress by any means possible, while being Robert's friend, his plans blow up in his face as he helps destroy one of the plans between Robert and Charlotte. Philip was one character whom at times seem like he cared and other times a true schemer. He could have done thing differently, in order to archive his goals, instead tried to take the easy way out. Philip knows he's done wrong but never goes out of his way to prove himself to be better. EL showing what evil ambition can do. Many of the evil characters get their just desserts but in very subtle ways. With many of their plans falling apart at the seams. While I wanted more focus on Robert (mostly) and Charlotte, I found that some of the focus shifted to other unlikeable characters whom I could cared less about, this expanded the story that much more.

Being a romance, in a lot of books now of days you expect sex, in *The Highest Stakes*, this happens off screen or implied with a little groping and some heavy kissing (and an almost rape scene as the character gets out of there quickly) but that's it, I really liked how this was done, with the main focus on their actions and consequences of the characters because they had sex , then just the physical act itself.

The Highest Stakes was an even expanding book, with the ending a tad abrupt for me, but then again if my plans to marry the guy I love were foiled so many times and I got my chance for a clean break, I do it Las Vegas style and get married as quick as I can!! Then epilogue did smooth this out making a clean break from the past hurts to the future joys.

Overall:. I greatly enjoyed this book from start to finish with a few little bumps in the road, this book never let my attention stray far and kept me reading, wanting to find out what would happen next! I can't wait for this author's next book!

Shawna says

4 ½ stars – Romantic Historical Fiction

Note: This is actually my second review, as the original got lost somewhere on the Island of Server Timeouts and Misfit Reviews.

At this stage in my life, I read exclusively romance (of various subgenres) because it's what interests and entertains me, and life is too short to read books that I don't want to. I used to read historical fiction and non-fiction because I enjoy learning about people and places in various times and seeing the ways society has changed, progressed, and sometimes digressed. That probably explains why I love historical romance so much, since it satisfies my historical and cultural curiosity while still giving me my much needed romance fix.

I'm not an equine expert by any means, but I enjoy equestrian sports and events, like horseracing, as a spectator and respect the awe-inspiring power, majestic beauty, and historical significance of horses. I love books and movies that feature horses prominently, like *Riding Lessons* by Sara Gruen, *The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans and its film version, *Lonesome Dove* by Larry McMurtry and the TV mini-series, one of my all time favorite movies *The Man From Snowy River*, and *Hidalgo*, *Seabiscuit*, and *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken* to name a few others.

So a book that combines 18th century English history with strong equine elements, like breeding and horseracing, and yet is at its heart an epic account of star-crossed lovers? That sounded intriguing indeed, and I'm grateful to new author Emery Lee for giving me the chance to read her romantic historical fiction debut, **The Highest Stakes**.

The attention grabbing prologue sets the stage for a riveting tale of retribution, but it's so much more than that. Set mostly in Georgian England and mainly spanning a period of nine years, between 1742 and 1751, this is a powerful, evocative, and complex tale of true love, social class differences, friendship, adventure, war, greed, betrayal, and revenge, all centered on and around the high stakes world of horseracing.

Let me just say upfront that although the racing serves as an important expression of characters and events, there are a lot of complicated details on horse breeding, bloodlines, lineages, and training that some readers might find a bit cumbersome, especially in the first part of the book, but I think you can skim through those passages (if it's not of great interest to you) and still highly enjoy all of the other elements. I know I did! There are several intriguing characters worth mentioning, but for the sake of brevity, I'll focus on the three key players: Charlotte, Robert, and Philip.

Orphaned Charlotte Wallace is a lonely, adventurous girl who's only freedom from her aristocratic uncle's cruelty, emotional neglect, and oppression is training and riding horses unimpeded across the heath of the family estate. Then she meets a kindred spirit and genuine friend in poor, hardworking stable groom Robert Devington, who shares her intense passion for horses, and their kinship soon evolves into deep love. Charlotte makes it clear that Robert's lack of social and financial status mean nothing to her and that all she desires is for them to be together. But Robert knows that her uncle and other members of the elitist ton will never accept him without wealth and standing, so he leaves to join the military in order to prove himself worthy of earning Charlotte's hand.

Robert becomes a trooper in the King's Horse Guard and develops a close friendship with his Troop's leader, Major Philip Drake. Philip is the second born son of an aristocratic family and an affable, notorious rake and spendthrift of often dubious morals, whereas Robert is serious, honorable, steadfast, loyal, and celibate in his faithfulness to Charlotte but of low class birth. Although Philip and Robert are complete opposites in social station and personality, theirs is a brotherhood forged in blood and battle. Their friendship is an integral part of the story and ultimately has far-reaching, irrevocable ramifications.

After distinguishing himself nobly in various military campaigns and earning a title and prestige in the King's Horse, Robert returns to claim his true love. However, Charlotte's villainous, elitist uncle refuses to see him as anything but a lowly stable hand, and he conspires with other forces to thwart their love and to keep Robert and Charlotte forever apart. This is where the "highest stakes" part of the plot comes into play, with an ultimate wager on a horserace with honor and a betrothal, not just money, as the prize that becomes a life-altering catalyst for the characters.

I was so infuriated at Robert for not trusting in Charlotte's commitment and willingness to endure any obstacle to be with him, regardless of his social position and lack of wealth, and for doubting her loyalty. But

I think his motivations, decisions, and reactions were totally realistic because a man's identity and pride are often tied with his being able to provide for and support his woman and family.

Philip Drake is a charismatic, complex, hard to define character whose selfish actions resulted in devastating consequences for several characters. There are multi-faceted layers to Philip's personality that have yet to be completely revealed, so I'm looking forward to finding out more about him and hopefully having some questions answered in Lee's next book.

It's an epic, against all odds love story that will twist your emotions and have you cheering, cursing in anger and frustration, and possibly screaming noooo! at times (like I did). But I have to give author Emery Lee kudos for its authenticity and for not taking the easy road with the characters, even though it was really trying to witness their pain, injustices, and hardships. One thing to keep in mind (for romance readers like me) is that although it's a passionate love story, the actual physical intimacies besides kissing and some mild petting happen off the page, but the relationships were so emotionally intense and well developed that I didn't miss the sex.

Two things kept me from rating it five stars: 1) The excessive equine breeding details that sometimes overwhelmed the story's flow and characters and 2) the abrupt, rather anticlimactic ending. After enduring so much emotional agony, tumult, heartbreak, and drama between Robert and Charlotte, I wanted a little more closure and gratification in the end. Yes, there is a satisfying HEA, but it's over with much too quickly. I wanted another chapter and/or more of an epilogue...darn you, Ms. Lee! :)

The Highest Stakes is an original, well researched, intelligently written, poignant, and sweeping saga that should appeal to horse enthusiasts, historical fiction readers, and fans of unique, complex, Georgian historical romance with star-crossed love theme. 4 ½ stars!

"Try as you may, you can never defy love."

Finally, mutually, and completely, they released all doubts, abandoned all fears, unwilling and unable to deny this overpowering love.

Gaby says

Emery Lee's *The Highest Stakes* opens at the races in Litchfield, Staffordshire in 1742. It's at this race that we're introduced to the characters that shape the novel. The race is for untried horses - those who have yet to win a race. Sir Garfield Wallace, a merchant who recently rose to the gentry, and an avid turf follower entered the gray mare White Rose ("Rosie") in the first race. But on the day of the race, the Wallaces are running late and the jockey, Sir Garfield's son Charles won't make it in time. The race is limited to gentlemen jockeys: no professional jockeys are allowed -- the horses must be ridden by the owner or a member of his family. Robert Devington who has worked for Sir Garfield as a trainer, jockey, and all around problem solver decides to take a dangerous risk and claims a relationship to the Wallace family in order to keep Rosie from forfeiting the race. Devington handles Rosie brilliantly though he wins the Wallaces considerable status, he finds himself shut out once again.

Though much in love with Charlotte Wallace, Sir Garfield's niece, Robert decides that the best way to win

her hand is to break away from the Wallaces and to make his own fortune. Robert enlists in the King's Horse. Robert Devington proves his mettle and somehow Robert's commanding officer, Captain Drake, becomes Robert's mentor and closest friend.

Robert and Drake find themselves closely allied as they woo Sir Garfield's niece and daughter respectively. But romance, intrigue, and social ambition keep the lovers apart -- and make *The Highest Stakes* a fascinating and unusual read.

In *The Highest Stakes*, the horse racing and breeding are more than a backdrop for the action and romance. It's the horses and those that breed, race and love them that give *The Highest Stakes* its unique and strong charm. I've loved horses and riding since I was young, but I think most animal lovers and lovers of historical fiction will find *The Highest Stakes* to be an engrossing and satisfying read.

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Review copy provided by the publisher.

Jennifer | says

Heres is the link for my review:

<http://web.me.com/quirion/Bookaddict/...>

Christy B says

Taking place in the 1740s and 50s in both Europe and the American colonies, ***The Highest Stakes*** is a vastly researched novel about horse racing and love.

Robert Devington desperately wants to marry Charlotte Wallace, but her uncle and guardian forbids it because, simply, Devington is a nobody.

I admit, some of the stuff in this novel flew right over my head. I know jack about horse racing and horses – I've never been near one in my life. I enjoyed the details of the racing. It was exciting. It felt like I was there.

Devington tries everything to win Charlotte. He joins the King's army and is made a Captain and comes back, hell bent on trying anything, even a horse race to convince her uncle, but the older man is most dastardly prejudice and doesn't keep his word.

While this soap opera plays out, we have Devington's friend Major Drake. Drake is a most intriguing character. He looks out for himself, but has a bit of a conscience. Sometimes we see these two fight within him and he has to make a quick decision. I was most interested in his story, I must admit. He gets the rug pulled over his eyes a few times and is played for a fool. By the end of the book I felt sorry for him.

Anyway, back to Devington. Thanks to Drake, Devington is faced with criminal charges and is sent to the American colonies. There, he changes his name and spends years working at his revenge against his former friend.

The revenge plays out almost like a movie. It was rather an exquisitely drawn out plot.

The Highest Stakes was a great debut novel. Lots of research and effort obviously went into this book and it shows. What you get is an intriguing historical saga.

Misfit says

3.5 stars

The story begins in 1742 and is focused around the love story of Charlotte Wallace and Robert Devington. Upon the death of her parents, Charlotte was raised in the household of her Uncle, Lord Gower. Surrounded by uncaring relatives Charlotte always is more at home in her uncle's stables and develops a close relationship with Robert, but as a groom he can never hope to wed her (although they can dream.....). Robert signs up as a soldier in King George's army and eventually strikes up a close friendship with Captain Phillip Drake, the younger son of the Earl of Hastings. Robert brings Phillip back to meet Lord Gower when their tour of duty is up, and Phillip finds himself quite charmed by Gower's daughter Beatrix, but that relationship brings on unforeseen circumstances.

Finding herself in a pickle, Beatrix needs a husband and Phillip's wastrel older brother needs to get an heir or his father will disinherit him and well, after that things start to get too complicated to try and explain without spoilers. Robert ends up in the cold and in the midst of a Big Misunderstanding of as well as facing charges for insubordination and he heads for the colonies with hatred in his heart. Thus sets up an Edmond Dantès style **Retribution** wherein Robert plots for years to wreak havoc on those who done him wrong.

All in all a pretty decent story, with the added touch of background of the world of horses, horseflesh, and the sport of racing, but at times the details on all things horsy can go on a bit and might not suit for a reader with no interest in the topic. I personally am clueless when it comes to horses so I'll leave that for other readers to judge if the author is spot on or not. While I did enjoy Robert and Charlotte's story and I had a hard time putting this one down, I felt that things got a tad bit too melodramatic and soap opera-ish about 1/2 of the way through, but she did pull it back up to par at the end. I'd have like to have had less of the strum and drang of the marital issues and more on Robert's life in Virginia – that was just a bit too rushed for my tastes. The **tis** and **betimes** language got a bit wearying as well, but still minor nits and a pretty solid first outing for author Emery Lee, looking forward to more. 3.5/5stars.

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

First of all, I want to thank Emery Lee for the opportunity to read her book. This was not a typical read for me, since I don't tend to read a lot of historical fiction that is not romance. *The Highest Stakes* was a good stepping stone for me into the historical fiction genre, with a good, strong love story for my romance-loving palate.

I have to confess I did not grow up with horses. I actually never really had contact with them until I was in college. So, I became a equine aficionado later in my life. Without a doubt, *The Highest Stakes* is a book for horse-lovers. It is very clear that Ms. Lee loves, understands, and respects horses; and is very much an equestrienne. I appreciate the detail that she put into describing people firmly immersed in horse culture, and in giving this horse-racing novice a crash course into the horse-racing industry. Now, don't expect me to be down at the horse tracks every weekend. That's not going to happen. But I must say, I have a lot more respect for what goes into horse-racing. I am just as much a horse-lover as I ever was, maybe a little more after this book. In fact, I loved reading about the details of equine husbandry. I can certainly see how it becomes an obsession that can drive people in many ways, like it did with the three main characters in this story: Robert, Charlotte, and Philip.

On top of the foundation of horse-racing, this is a story about human nature: the dark sides, and the fundamental urges within people that drive them to achieve what they want most in life. For Robert and Charlotte, they just wanted each other. A mutual love of horses was their initial connection, and a great love blossomed between them from that starting point. Their road to happiness was a very crooked, even heartbreaking path. Many times, I felt like I was being twisted into painful knots as I read about all the troubles that this couple faced. I wanted to keep reading, crossing my fingers that things would work out; and at times, I was afraid to read one more page, for fear that their love would be driven past the point of survival. Fate seemed against them at many turns, although there was also a providential guiding hand that kept them working and striving towards their future together. I came to love and respect them both very deeply. I respect Ms. Lee that she was not afraid to put this couple through so much over the course of this book, even if it didn't always make for comfortable reading for me.

Philip was by far the most complex character. I must confess I still don't quite have him figured out. He manages to be a very self-serving person, but at the same time, he has a core of honor. Towards the end of the book, I really wanted to hate him, but I found I could not, because he was such a fascinating person, and truly did want to be a good man. He made some wrong decisions that really hurt two people that he cared about. At the same time, he played an important role in their destinies, and in some ways, helped to drive them to achieve the successes they obtained in the horsebreeding fields. One thing was for certain, he came very close to stealing the show, despite the fact that I really loved Robert and Charlotte's characters.

The writing was very good. Ms. Lee firmly establishes the Georgian period, and she doesn't have to spend a lot of detail describing what the characters wore, or what their houses looked like. Instead, she weaves in a time table of important events that occur in the background of this story, and which involve Robert and Phillip to no small extent. It felt very authentic, yet she always kept this book readable. To be honest, I am not sure that this book would appeal to readers who have no interest in horses. But that's okay. I am glad that Ms. Lee wrote a book about a subject that she clearly has a lot of passion for, and did it well; for her passion for horses is quite infectious to those who have the slightest inclination in that direction.

Quite frankly, this book came very close to being a five star book. I think that for readers who don't mind some very complicated obstacles between the hero and heroine, it probably would be a five star book. Unfortunately, I just don't like when the hero and heroine are together while they are married to other people. I really regretted that Robert and Charlotte's first time together occurs after she is forced to marry Philip. I can see that this was a realistic choice for Ms. Lee to make in plotting her story, but it just left a bad taste in my mouth. I would have preferred for Robert and Charlotte's happy ending to be unmarred by this. I freely admit that adultery is my huge pet peeve and it's hard to get past that when I am reading a romantic story. Despite that fact, I cheered on the couple for being able to get their happy ending. My other issue was that I found the ending to be a little abrupt. I was very glad to see Robert and Charlotte to achieve many of their life goals, but I would have preferred to see a little more page time spent on their reunion and how they dealt

with Phillip. I did like the letter. It was a nice, and very fitting way for some of the denouement to be incorporated into the story.

The Highest Stakes was an excellent book. I was emotionally and intellectually involved with this story. It is very clear that Ms. Lee put a lot of heart and soul into this book, making for a great reading experience. Highly recommended to horse-lovers, fans of historical fiction, and those who love a good star-crossed romance.

Overall rating: **4.5/5.0 stars.**

TJ says

Wow, I don't know where to start with this book, so much to say, so little space! First I need to say I LOVED it, it was INCREDIBLE. So why the 4 star rating, well, that's the problem, there are so many layers to this book, one would almost have to review it in stages to really do it justice, it's just that complex.

The first half of the book spends a lot of time describing the intricacies of the horse breeding and racing world of the 18th century. To a horse lover or anyone open to learning, it is interesting. It is explained in such detail, however, that it almost overshadows the developing story. Those readers who have but a general interest in these things may choose to give up and quit reading. That would be a BIG mistake! Even if one has to skim-read parts, I would encourage perseverance because the second half of the book takes off like a lightening shot and never looks back!

Charlotte and Robert's love for each other, in spite of their differences in social standing, pits them against the world, building through the first half of the book, then launching us on a roller-coaster ride of emotion until the final confrontation at the end. I have seldom seen more twists and turns that I could NOT figure out or guess the outcome of! It is so well written that it keeps you blindly guessing in the dark with each new coil. The history is point on, deftly interwoven into the plot in such a way that one doesn't feel dumped on but is enlightened without really recognizing.

The one problem (and it is a big one) I saw among the multitude of applause is the ending. I HATED IT!!! Dare I add more exclamation points? It is not the HEA, per say (there is one) it is the circumstances directly leading up to that "happily ever after". Upon reading the last three pages of the story, I wanted to throw the book at the wall, then run over and stomp on it repeatedly and throw it at the opposite wall! DO NOT bring me to a heart wrenching climax, then just give up (hmm, no pun intended)!!!! A climatic ending works only if the reader is left satisfied enough to believe the HEA is real!

Whew, ahem...I'm calm, I'm calm now... (kudos to the author who can get me this emotionally involved!) I would highly recommend this book if only to provide people to discuss it with. Someone really needs to help me through that ending before I attempt any more Emery Lee books.

Tara Chevreton says

This is a very dramatic tale, reads much like a soap opera in the early days of horse racing. However, the book cover may have one thinking it is mostly about Charlotte. That is not the case.. It follows Robert and his friend Philip most of the time with very little of the limelight focusing on Charlotte who despite donning a pair of breeches and riding astride a horse, is a typical damsel in distress.

I liked the book tho. It kept me guessing. For once, I couldn't predict every turn and outcome. The summary is something like this: Robert loves Charlotte, but he comes from a "lower class" and Charlotte's uncle and guardian forbids the match. Robert attempts every trick in his book but cannot win her hand and won't dishonor her name by just running off with her. He enlists the help of his war buddy, Philip, who in turn, falls in love with the dowry of Charlotte's cousin. Well, Philip only looks out for Philip. Thus, Robert may be trusting the wrong person... and one plan after another to win his beloved Charlotte backfires. Will they ever be together?

In the midst of all this pining for each other, there is the war between George and Bonnie Prince Charlie and with both Robert and Philip being soldiers, readers see what is going on on that end. When the fellows are not fighting or trying to win their women, they are racing horses. I liked the "horsey" stuff but at times, there was WAY too much information on each horse's dam and sire and breeding background. As a reader, I just wanted it to get back to the story and didn't care less who the horse's mommy and daddy was and forgot that information by the time it reached the next page. Also, Charlotte turns out to be somewhat a disappointment to a reader that likes strong, independent heroines.

Nevertheless, an enjoyable read. I loved all the drama, outlandish bets, backstabbing friends, and shocking turnabouts. The exception being the last quarter.. too much Philip. Four stars.

UniquelyMoi ~ BlithelyBookish says

The Highest Stakes is author Emery Lee's debut novel and, quite simply put, a story of epic proportions! It's a tale of betrayal, murder, redemption, love lost and love found, scheming, more betrayal, heroes and villains, heroines and shrews, war and peace, retribution, manipulation, love lost again, then found again, greed, humor, sorrow, twists, turns and... well... sounds a bit like a historical soap opera, doesn't it? But I'm telling you... General Hospital was *never* this good!!

I've often found that in order to hold my attention, I need a story heavy on the romance, so having been told that this book isn't really a romance at all, I hadn't felt the urge to read it. *Really?* Not a romance? Well, I beg to differ, because while romance is not the primary focus in this story, it's definitely the reason for it! Yes, quite a lot of the tale is dedicated to the sport of horse racing, and the passion of all things equine, but the driving force behind this story is love, and doing *whatever* is needed to be with that one person who is more important to you than any other; the love of your life.

One of my very favorite things about historical novels is that wonderful feeling of leaving the present behind and being swept away to another time and place, and Emery Lee gave me that! With richly detailed descriptions of life in Georgian England and authentic period dialog, I was right there with our characters whether they were at the races, hearts pounding in anticipation of victory, or in battle fighting for their very

lives, and even experiencing something as simple as that first kiss. I was *there* through it all and it doesn't get any better than that.

While I do admit to skimming through most of the more detailed blood-lining and breeding techniques which took up a good bit of the early pages, what I did read of it was fascinating. And, for those of you who might be wondering, if I were to rate this story based on violence or sexuality, I'd call it PG-13. Any scenes of intimacy were only alluded to and took place behind closed doors. That said, while I normally like a little more steam in the books I read, I don't feel that this story suffered for the lack of it.

There were quite a few quotes I would have loved to use in this review, but most of them would have given away far too much of the story, so I've narrowed it down to just two. This first one comes after a scene I found quite heartbreaking and, like it or not, has the ring of truth to it.

"Now as to our business, sir. I have done your bidding, though it was clearly contrary to my conscience and cost me dearly. In truth, no dowry could compensate for what I have lost."

Sir Garfield pulled a fat coin purse from his pocket. "And what would you expect as recompense for your *losses*?"

"There is no restitution for integrity," he said bitterly.

"On the contrary, Major. Integrity always has a price. To lose or to keep; there is invariably a cost. Some just pay more dearly than others."

And this second quote – well, I was laughing as I read it. Those of us who love our historical romance novels know that many a bride-to-be didn't *want* to be. So this little exchange between mother and daughter was pretty humorous, especially the first paragraph. Maybe it was this kind of thinking that gave birth to the phrase, "God's gift to women!"

Lady Felicia reassured her with a pat on the hand. "My dearest daughter, though it is a sad injustice, a woman seldom weds to her own volition. The Good Lord bestowed upon males the greater reasoning and intellect, thus it is for us women to obey them."

"But what if the man is a besotted lech... or a fusty bore... or ill-visaged, bad tempered, and deformed... or stingy, cruel, and close-fisted... or all of it!" she wailed.

"Trixie, I clearly sympathize, but pray cease the histrionics. As to your apprehensions, a clever woman can learn to manage her husband, even one who is... shall we say... less than desirable."

"But, Mama, *I don't want such a husband!*"

"Hear me out, Beatrix," she admonished. "If your husband should be faithless, affect ignorance. If he has a predilection for strong drink, feign tolerance; if he is choleric or sullen, be long-suffering until his mood spends itself. If he be a close-fisted despot, adopt a demure address. But if he be a weak and incompetent man, count your blessings, for you need only give him the very orders you should later receive from him. Lastly and most importantly, if you have wealth and position, your marriage need not be the least incommodious, regardless of your husband's temperament."

The bottom line - *The Highest Stakes* was a pleasure to read and I highly recommend it to any fan of historical fiction and storylines that haven't already been done to death. If you're like me, you want to feel as though you're actually a part of the stories you read rather than just a curious onlooker. You need to care about the men and women and their struggles and triumphs. Well, if that's the case, I really do think you'd enjoy this story. I found my emotions all over the place, feeling sorrow one minute, joy the next, and even laughing out loud at times! But most importantly, I found myself in love with our hero and heroine, Robert and Charlotte, and cheering them on as they fought the less than favorable odds for their *happily ever after*.

I'm very much looking forward to Philip's story, *Fortune's Son*, and can't wait to see if, or how, he can possibly be redeemed!

Amy Bruno says

Let me start off by saying that when I accepted this book for review I was a little hesitant because I'm not really a horse person and have no knowledge of horse racing, but with my quest to broaden my historical fiction reading I thought I would give it a try. And, I am so glad I did!! Emery Lee's debut novel *The Highest Stakes* was a really fabulous read.

Set in 18th century England, the main plot of the story is of Charlotte and Robert and their quest to be together despite Charlotte's uncle's disapproval. Charlotte is an orphan and being brought up in her uncle's home, where Robert is the stable hand and they fall in love when Robert teaches Charlotte to ride. Now, that sounds like a pretty unoriginal plot, BUT that's not all and here is where Emery Lee shines! The author throws in some twists of fate and a few surprises and you find yourself reading as fast as you can because you need to know what comes next! There are times the intricacies of either horse racing or the many horse origins can slow the story down a bit (especially if you're not a horse person), but the author never dwells on it long and the story picks back up again. It's apparent that the author really knows her stuff and I guess she should be a lifelong equestrian and all!

Along with the charming and sweet Charlotte and the handsome Robert, Emery includes a fun and quirky cast of characters; from the mischievous rake Philip Drake whom you can't help but love, to Charlotte's hateful uncle Garfield Wallace bent on using Charlotte as a means to better his social standing and all of them in between.

Entertaining and gripping, *The Highest Stakes* is a fantastic romp through the world of horse racing in Georgian England and I heartedly recommend it!

Shelly says

THE HIGHEST STAKES – Review by Shelly

Although I am not a big book reader, particularly in a literal sense (and this is a very big book) I am a lifelong lover of all things equine. The horse racing alone gave this novel enough mystique for me to pick it up, and although it was a big investment of my time to read, it was absolutely worth it!

I was totally engrossed by the historical aspects of this book from an equine perspective. The author fills the pages with so many fascinating facts and details about 18th century horse racing, training and breeding practices.

As to the love story of Robert and Charlotte - although I've never been one for sappiness and detest romance novels, the relationship between Robert and Charlotte was so real to me it was almost tangible. Their was true love born of a shared passion for horses and each other. I rejoiced every time it looked like they would finally be together to follow their shared dream, and was furious every time some scoundrel or twist of fate would dash their dreams to pieces.

And sooo much treachery!! I couldn't put it down! The unexpected plot twists and outright villainy in this book keep me turning the pages well into the night.

For horse lovers – this book surely deserves five stars.
