



Mischief and Mistletoe

*Mary Jo Putney , Jo Beverley , Joanna Bourne , Patricia Rice , Nicola Cornick , Cara Elliott , Anne Gracie ,
Susan Fraser King*

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1 She Stoops to Wenchdom by Mary Jo Putney - Vicar's "little angel" daughter Lucinda Richards 22 disguises as tavern girl Lacey for back from wars Captain Gregory Kenmore.

2 Miss Brockhurst's Christmas Campaign by Jo Beverley - Penelope competes with debutante for Cherryholt heir Ross Skerries.

3 Intrigue and Mistletoe by Joanna Bourne - Elinor Pennington is found by Jack Tyler, former lover, spy searching French agent.

4 Wench in Wonderland by Patricia Rice - After coach accident, companion Damaris Bedloe is mistaken for Lady Alice by Adam, Viscount Trevelyan and motherless brood.

5 On a Wicked Winter's Night by Nicola Cornick - Wales innkeeper Lydia Cole houses once-rejected childhood friend John Jerrold, new Baron of Newport castle estate.

6 Weathering the Storm by Cara Elliot - Boston seaworthy Sophie Thirkell captains boat bought by elegant English diplomat Bentley, Lord Leete.

7 The Mistletoe Bride by Anne Gracie - Scotland Laird Ronan McAllister buys dying wife Mrs Smith, who gives care of toddlers to fellow coach passenger Marguerite Blackett-Smith.

8 A Wilder Wench by Susan King - Scottish Highland new sheriff Lord Dunallan has documents to free brother of Cristina Heron-Shaw, smuggler's orphan.

Mischief and Mistletoe Details

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From Reader Review Mischief and Mistletoe for online ebook

? Kimberly says

Mischief and Mistletoe is a collection of historical fiction romances set around the Yuletide season. This was a delightful collection and while I had favorites I can honestly say I enjoyed each and every tale by these talented authors

She Stoops to Wenchdom by Mary Jo Putney shares the story of a damaged young man's return from war and that of a young woman who goes to extremes to get his attention. It was sweet, funny and made me feel warm and fuzzy.

Miss Brockhurst's Christmas Campaign by Jo Beverley is about Pen a young woman who at twenty three is called the heartbreaker. She has broken three engagements and only recently has she learned why or should I say whom. This holiday she plans to finally get her man. This was fun, and Pen's plotting made me laugh.

Intrigue and Mistletoe by Joanne Bourne shares the tale of a spy on a mission who falls in love, only to lose her. When they are reunited can he win her back? This was interesting and had a little mystery.

Wench in Wonderland by Patricia Rice was a delightful tale about a young woman who helps her friend to escape an arranged marriage even though it will mean she will become destitute. Fearful of the future but confident of her decision this holiday tale her faithfulness might give her the greatest gift of all.

On a Wicked Winter Night by Nicola Cornick, a young unwed woman with a child is the landlord of Silent Wench in Newport and the fallen daughter of a Duke. On a stormy night a childhood friend arrives at the inn and she discovers he is the new Baron of Newport. Johnny is delighted to see Lydia again and determined to not let her get away this time. This was a warm tale about allowing yourself to be happy.

Weathering the Storm by Cara Elliot was an adventure at high sea with Sophia and Bentley, full of danger, pirates and near mishaps this short story held the promise of new beginnings.

The Mistletoe Bride by Anne Gracie was a delightful tale set in Scotland. A young man must marry before thirty to get the funds he needs to replenish his estates. The plan, marry a dying woman. Of course things don't always work out as planned. I loved this one. I laughed and even got misty eyed.

A Wilder Wench by Susan King set in Scotland this was another delightful tale. We meet Cristina who is eager to save her brother wrongfully being held. Dunallan the new sheriff might just be able to save her. This was a fun read.

I highly recommend Mischief and Mistletoe. All of the tales were delightful and this would make a fabulous gift for yourself or someone on your shopping list. I read this over Thanksgiving weekend and was able to complete a story at a time. The length of each tale is perfect for reading one a night to get you in the holiday spirit.

I want to thank Kensington for providing this ARC in exchange for my unbiased review.
Kimba @ Caffeinated Book Reviewer

Charlotte says

Putney, 3stars. Heroine disguises herself as barwench to attract war hero. Clunky dialogue, too simplistic plot.

Beverley, 2stars. Barely qualifies as a romance, as the plot is heroine squaring off with rival for bland, barely-there hero's affections, not about the couple at all. Yet the resolution has the rival disappearing off page, while on page the hero and heroine says their Iloveyou's. Very poor.

Bourne, 4stars. Very good. Slow reveal of characters stranded at inn during snowstorm, with a French spy on the loose.

Rice, 4stars. Very good. A companion tries to cover up that her cousin had eloped while stranded at hero's home. Really liked the hero and heroine and they were well matched. Not enough time to actually fall in love, but the author recognises this and left me with the assurance that love is just around the corner. Well done.

Cornick, 3stars. Didn't like heroine, she seemed stupid to me. The writing had some unfortunate melodramatic turns of phrase that annoyed me, but otherwise competent.

Elliott, 1star. Man, this was bad. The heroine is annoying - she thinks delivering a family heirloom to people she hasn't met is just as important as a diplomatic dispatch. Twit. The writing was very keen to seem historical and merely seemed to be trying too hard. The word naught was used too much. And at one point the hero, a landlubber, swears by Neptune. The author also does not seem to know how to correctly use italics. DNF

Gracie, 4stars. Heroine takes dying woman's place in a marriage of convenience. Very good, though the Iloveyou's came a little quick.

King, 1star. Writing is cumbersome, repetitive, not tight enough for novella. Has the heroine trying to perform a highway robbery to save her brother, hero foils, they find a letter that says they were promised to be married, the end. Plot completely unresolved, ending abruptly with no closure.

AVG rating 2,75

All in all, there were some good ones here, but the bad ones really annoyed me. Am not surprised that Gracie and Bourne did well, and will be looking to see what else Rice has written. But Elliott and King are going on the never-read list.

Susan says

She Stoops to Wenchdom - Mary Jo Putney

Lucy is the daughter of a vicar who has been in love with one of her father's former students since she was seventeen. She hadn't seen Gregory in five years, until she encountered him at a Christmas celebration. She was heartbroken when he didn't recognize her, and dismayed when he left right after dancing with her. Gregory was surprised to see what a beauty his old friend had grown into. He is drawn to her sweetness and innocence, but after five years at war he considers himself unworthy to pursue her. He has been unable to overcome some of the things he has seen and done, and has been hiding from his memories.

I really liked Lucy. Even suffering from her heartbreak, when she hears that Gregory spends his time drinking at the local tavern she's determined to go see him and try to get a kiss from him before she moves on. So she disguises herself as a barmaid to try to get closer to him. Gregory notices the attractive new girl, and steps in when she is accosted by a couple drunks. He finds himself opening up to her about his experiences in the war, and is comforted by the things she tells him, gaining a new perspective on his

ordeals. I liked seeing the way he took back his life after his talk with her. He wants to see her again, but she has disappeared.

I liked the ending of the story, as he finds his barmaid in a most unlikely place. His words are sweet as he shows her just what effect she had on him. He's now ready to think about a future with her.

Miss Brockhurst's Christmas Campaign - Jo Beverley

Pen is a young woman who has been engaged three times, but has broken them off each time, unable to go through with the marriages. After seeing her childhood friend Ross for the first time in years, she finally realized she'd always loved him, and that was why she couldn't settle on anyone else. When she and her mother are invited to spend Christmas with his family, she has hopes of making her dreams come true.

She's dismayed to discover upon arrival that there is another young woman who has her sights also set on Ross. As the visit progresses, she worries about Ross selecting this other girl, who seems so very wrong for him. She's determined to show Ross just how wrong.

I enjoyed seeing the descriptions of the various Christmas traditions that were celebrated. Each one was used to illustrate the differences between the two young ladies vying for Ross's attention. It was easy to agree with Pen's assertion that Cassandra wasn't the right one. She and her mother both seemed to be much more suited for a conservative household, than one that enjoyed even the pagan Christmas traditions.

I loved seeing all of Pen's efforts. She knew what she wanted and she had no trouble going after it. The ending was very good and I liked getting Ross's side of things. It was great to see him make sure she understood his concerns. I loved the final bit on Twelfth Night.

Intrigue and Mistletoe - Joanna Bourne

Elinor is one of several people on a coach that is stranded by a snowstorm. They take refuge in an inn with other travelers caught in the storm. Another one of those travelers is Jack, a man she had known and loved two years earlier. She felt betrayed by him when she discovered he was a spy catcher who was after her uncle.

Jack had asked her to wait a few days so he could tell her everything, but she disappeared instead. He has been looking for her ever since, and fears that she is somehow involved in his current case. He is on the trail of a spy who has a list of English contacts. He knows the person is at the inn, but not who it is.

Jack is determined to gain Elinor's forgiveness, and she is just as determined not to give it. She had risked her heart with him before and didn't want to do it again. But as they are forced into each other's company, Elinor discovers that her feelings for Jack haven't changed. She's still wary of trusting him, but her heart knows what it wants. I enjoyed their conversations as they got to know each other again. It was also interesting to see how they worked together to figure out who the spy was. I wasn't entirely surprised by the spy's identity, but the code used was intriguing. I enjoyed the confrontation between Elinor and the spy. While being a bit dangerous for Elinor, it was also pretty amusing to see what Elinor did. Jack's reaction was great, and I loved how his protectiveness came out.

Wench in Wonderland - Patricia Rice

Damaris has been the companion to her cousin for many years. Her uncle took her in when her parents died, and made her responsible for the care of Alice. He doesn't approve of the man that Alice has fallen in love with, and has betrothed her to a young nobleman, Mack Trevelyan, who needs her dowry. As Damaris and Alice are on their way to visit her fiance, Alice informs Damaris that she is eloping with the man she loves and asks Damaris to continue the journey alone to give her a chance to get away.

Nearing the end of the trip Damaris is caught in a blizzard, which causes an accident with the coach. Damaris is knocked unconscious, and when she awakes discovers that the family of Alice's fiance believes that she is Alice. The fiance is not at home at the time to clear up the confusion and Damaris is suffering some confusion due to her injuries. By the time she realizes what has happened she doesn't know quite how to fix it.

Mack's older brother Adam is a widower who has been in charge of the estate for many years. He has three children who run wild and he has no idea how to deal with them. He has hoped that his brother's fiancée would be willing to step in and help.

I loved seeing the way that Damaris immediately took to the children. She was able to do things with them that no one else had done. I liked her common sense methods and that she was able to explain to Adam just what he should do. The kids were a lot of fun with their sweet natures but tendency to get into scrapes. She feels badly about her deception, and when it all comes out she feels she has no choice but to leave. It took Adam a little while to find her, and then he had to convince her that he really does want her. I loved the part the kids played in convincing him to go after her.

On a Wicked Winter's Night - Nicola Cornick

Johnny is a viscount who has inherited his uncle's estate in Wales. He has fond memories of it from when he was a child, and is determined to fix it up and live there. He's involved in a carriage accident when he arrives near the town, and is taken to the local inn for the night. There he finds Lydia, the girl he had loved when he was younger. She owns and runs the local inn and takes care of her young daughter.

Lydia had been good friends with Johnny when they were young, but never saw him as anything else. Instead she fell for a man who turned out to be less than honorable. She turned Johnny down when he proposed in order to take care of her, not wanting to ruin his life. Publicly ruined, she moved to Wales and passed herself off as a widow. She never expected to see Johnny again.

Johnny was surprised to see Lydia again, and realized that his feelings for her had never gone away. He still wants her and sees her as the woman he needs. I loved the way that he tried to show her that her past makes no difference to him and confesses his feelings for her. Lydia loves him too, but doesn't want her past to create problems for him. A near tragedy shows her what she would be giving up and she has to decide if love can overcome all her fears.

Weathering the Storm - Cara Elliott

Very fun story. Sophie Thirkell, daughter of a Boston merchant, is on her way to London to make a Christmas delivery to her father's estranged family. Lord Leete, British diplomat, is on the same ship, one

belonging to Sophie's father, when it is damaged in a storm. The story opens as Leete is trying to make arrangements to get himself to London in time for a critical meeting and is running into obstacles, not the least of which is Sophie.

These two have been striking sparks off each other for awhile. They met on several occasions in Boston with explosive results. Sophie thinks Leete is a stuck up stick in the mud, and he thinks she's a hellion. Sophie isn't one who thinks much of the rules that govern a woman's behavior and takes great pleasure in flaunting them. In their current situation, they discover that they have to work together if either has a hope of getting to London on time.

I loved their interactions as each tends to poke at each other, but underneath can't really deny that there's something immensely appealing also. I loved seeing the way they cooperated throughout the hazards of their trip. There were some pretty funny moments, especially as Leete deals with being ordered around by Sophie. I really enjoyed seeing the effect that their adventures had on him, as his diplomatic stuffiness had to give way to the needs of some quick thinking. I loved seeing him admit that his attitude in Boston hadn't been disapproval, but the inability to think when he was around her. And Sophie had simply been trying to protect her heart from rejection. The scene at the end was pretty sweet. The only thing I would have liked to see, would be her arrival in London, and the reaction of her family.

The Mistletoe Bride - Anne Gracie

Ronan needs a wife if he's going to get the money from his inheritance. His great-aunt made it a condition of her will, and he isn't happy about it. He was married before, for five terrible years, before his wife left him and later died. He doesn't want to do it again, but if he wants to make the repairs to his estate, he'll have to do it. His lawyer suggests paying a woman to marry him would work, and if he marries one who's dying, it won't matter. He feels a bit guilty about that idea, but goes along with it.

Marguerite has come back to England from India after her father's death. She would have stayed there, but the climate made her ill. Her uncle in Scotland has agreed to take her in. On the way there, she meets a woman who is very ill. Peggy confesses that she's on the way to marry a man who needs a wife but doesn't want one. She's doing it to get the money to take care of her two little girls. Along the way, the woman passes away, after extracting a promise from Meg that she will take care of her girls.

When someone arrives at the coach stop to pick her up, Meg believes it is her uncle's people. Instead, it is Ronan's, and he believes she is his bride to be. Though she tries to explain the mix up, Ronan doesn't listen and marries her anyway. Meg intends to fulfill the contract, then go find Peggy's girls and raise them herself.

Neither one expects to develop feelings for the other. I liked seeing the two of them get to know each other. It was sweet to see how easily Meg fit in and how Ronan began to wish that she would stay. When Ronan finally learns the truth, he feels betrayed, thinking Meg is like his first wife. Though he stays angry for a few days, he soon starts to realize what he will miss if Meg leaves. I loved the end as he really listens to her reasons and realizes how much he cares. I loved what he did for Meg that showed her just how he felt. The epilogue was really sweet.

A Wilder Wench - Susan King

The story begins with a young Cristina and her little brother hiding from the tax men who are looking for her

father who has been smuggling whiskey. She is discovered by a teenaged boy named Ned, who doesn't expose her. Eleven years later she is living with her vicar uncle, who is entertaining the local magistrate and the new sheriff, Viscount Dunallen. She overhears them talking about transferring the prisoner that they have, once the transfer papers arrive later that night.

She is determined to get those papers, because the prisoner they have is her brother, falsely accused of smuggling. She comes up with the idea of holding up the coach with the courier and stealing the papers, delaying the transfer until she can think of something else. An unwanted distraction is the fascination she has for the handsome viscount.

Dunallen has come to the area after inheriting from his grandfather. He doesn't plan to stay long, as he has a law practice in Edinburgh. He is a quiet man, preferring his history books and his job to the social life of his peers. He likes his life as it is, and doesn't plan to succumb to the matchmaking wiles of the local mothers and aunts. But he has to admit that there is something very appealing about the vicar's niece. They seem to have much in common, with their love of history and Sir Walter Scott's writings.

Cristina's plans to stop the coach don't go quite as planned. I loved seeing her politeness as she attempts to get the courier to turn over the papers. When Dunallen comes upon her, she flees, trying to get away before he can recognize her. Naturally, he catches her, and the truth comes out. I loved the parts with the pies and the dogs, and also what the papers were that she had taken. As they talk, Dunallen realizes that Cristina is the same girl he protected all those years ago. I loved the twist at the end that involved one of his grandfather's letters and her father.

kris says

I was a little frustrated by a few things (the fact that every inn was "The _____ Wench"; the awkward Christmas "theme"), but *Intrigue and Mistletoe* and *The Mistletoe Bride* were pretty stand-out. I highly recommend checking them out if you're in the mood for a. Christmas stories; b. short stories; c. Joanna Bourne KICKING ASS; d. Anne Gracie leaving you wanting more.

She Stoops to Wenchnom, Mary Jo Putney

Lucy Richards has got a crush on Gregory Kenmore!! OMG!! He went away to war 5 years ago and returns broken and dirtied (or so he thinks), so when he comes across Lucy again her ~untainted innocence is just Too Much. Lucy thinks that's whack, so she dresses up as a "wench" and serves him beer in the local tavern, hoping to steal a kiss and send him on his way. EXCEPT OH NO FEELINGS.

1. I don't quite get the over-reliance on wenching as a thing. It's...not cute.
2. While I'm glad Gregory learned that women are people too (with feelings and everything!), it was still a character trait that did not sit well with me. Yes, war is horrible and it lingers--but the internal comments about Lucy vs. Lacey were rather off-putting (i.e., how Lucy, as a well-bred young lady could never understand what he went through, but Lacey, because she was a lowly tavern wench, was totally sympathetic...?). 2.5 stars.

Miss Brockhurst's Christmas Campaign, Jo Beverly

Pen has decided that she will marry her old bff Ross or no one! So when she and her mother get invited to his place for Christmas, she launches an all-out campaign to steal him from the girl he is considering proposing to.

WOW I HATED THIS ONE. 1. The entire thing is told from Pen's perspective, which means we never know how Ross feels about Pen throwing herself in his path and constantly deriding the girl he's maybe-courting, which 2. makes Pen's asides and maneuvering feel less like love and more like a spoiled brat throwing a damned tantrum, tied to 3. I just really didn't like Pen? I get bold and brash--or I try to as that is not me--but she pushed it into self-centered and boorish. She was just too sure that she knew all and fuck all the rest!! .25 stars

Intrigue and Mistletoe, Joanna Bourne

Elinor is on her way home from York for Secret Reasons when she runs into her old lover, Jack, who is trailing her stagecoach for Secret Reasons as well. Will their Secret Reasons be enough to keep their Secret Parts from touching?

I don't know if it's a good sign when you finish a short story and feel like banging your fists on the table, demanding more. BUT DAMN DID I WANT MORE. Bourne is a god-damned *master*, spinning out characters that feel heavy and hard from the lives they lead, throwing well-crafted mis-directions and clues into the text with a precise eye for how they should fall, and--as always--fucking *owning* dialogue all over the place. She's just *AMAZING* at it. I can't get over how you can *taste* the non-English languages in her characters' mouths and IT IS JUST SO MIND-BLOWING. GOD DAMN I AM OVERUSING ITALICS AND SWEAR WORDS AND THE WORD AMAZING: YOU KNOW I MEAN BUSINESS. Not to mention I just really enjoyed how competent they were, and how Jack's distancing tactics get stripped away as he realizes that he might lose Elinor again and FUCK I LIKED THIS A LOT. 4 stars

Wench in Wonderland, Patricia Rice

Damaris is on her way to her cousin Alice's fiancée's brother's house (I *know*). Except: snowy carriage wreck! A case of plotty amnesia! And Adam--the brother in question--thinks he has perfect Alice in his shitty dad clutches. What will happen when the fiancée finally shows up??

Eurgh. There's approximately 0.5% base for the romance: he thinks she'll make a decent mom! She thinks he's kind of dreamy! They know each other for about 24 hours before she flees the house and a week later he follows! 1 star

On a Wicked Winter's Night, Nicola Cornick

Johnny has just been named baron of some remote castle. On his way there, he gets into a carriage accident and seeks refuge at the local inn--where he finds himself face-to-face with lost love Lydia Cole who refused him a few years back! She's all "get out! your fiery loins compel me!" and he's like "damn right they do!" Will they finally admit they love each other like for real?

This held my interest, although it was piece-y and not altogether the best developed thing I've ever read. I wanted to know a bit more about Johnny and Lydia, and I would definitely have appreciated more of him attempting to prove his feelings. 3 stars

Weathering the Storm, Cara Elliot

Sophie and Bentley are trying to make it to London from...somewhere else and they hate each other. So he buys a boat and hires her to captain it and off they go! Adventures ahoy! OH WAIT THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A ROMANCE??

Definitely underdeveloped. Sophie and Bentley are pretty clearly misunderstanding each other and allegedly it's because he's Hoity-Toity British and she's Brash-Ass American, but who knows? A few awkward "embraces" later and the story closes on a (very realistically) vague hint that they might maybe someday be something more than friends. Maybe. 2 stars

The Mistletoe Bride, Anne Gracie

Ronan needs himself a temporary wife, so his solicitor finds him a widow who also happens to be dying. Marguerite, on her way to her miser Uncle, befriends a sick Peggy on the stagecoach north. Peggy dies, but only after confessing she's on her way north to marry for a paycheck so she can save her children from the workhouse! Marguerite inadvertently gets picked up by Ronan's peeps and then very advertently gets herself married to the fellow. BRACE YOURSELF FOR IMMINENT EMOTIONS.

OKAY, SO. I liked this, but it ABSOLUTELY needed to be a full-length book. There was so much potential: the 30 day deadline! His expectation that he's married an experienced widow! The assumption that she's dying! Her deceiving him! Ronan's frustration that he doesn't know where she's going once the 30 days are up--but she absolutely HAS to go save the kids! IT'S JUST GREAT. Unfortunately, *The Mistletoe Bride* really suffered from it's (lack of) length. 3 stars

A Wilder Wench, Susan King

Cristina's dad is a Scottish smuggler. Edward is the son of the sheriff? They met once, years ago, and now he's got weird boners for the vicar's niece OH WAIT SHE'S THE GIRL FROM BEFORE and now she's also a highwaywoman and what the hell is going on with her brother? Something something feelings.

I...didn't follow all of this. There were packages going in every direction? And her brother was locked up in a tollhouse? And she was going to...steal documents to set him free? Also pie? 2 stars

Gerrie says

The short stories by Anne Gracie, Mary Jo Putney, and Jo Beverley were solid 4 - 4.5 star reads for me, and I'm giving the book 4 stars based on those three stories.

Loredana (Bookinista08) says

I read the Romanian version of this holiday romance collection, and I was pleasantly surprised by it. Some of these 8 stories I really enjoyed and I thought were well-written. What I hadn't expected, though, was not liking the stories written by M.J. Putney and Jo Beverley. They were sappy and forced and the characters were just too plain for me. However, the other stories in the collection were really good and enticing. I'll post a more in-depth review as soon as possible, since this is a 4-star book and I want to recommend it to all

romantic souls out there, as there's not that much time left until Christmas.

Susannah Carleton says

I enjoyed this book. All the stories were good, but I most enjoyed Mary Jo Putney's, Patricia Rice's, and Anne Gracie's.

Dana Burda says

Mary Jo Putney trece pe numele s'u o culegere de mici povești foarte romantice scrise de scriitoare bine cunoscute ale acestui gen având ca temă comună s'rbătoarea Crăciunului. Volumul a apărut la noi la editura Litera în colecția Cărți romantice, în anul 2013, cu titlul Săruturi furate. Autoarele care apar în volum sunt Jo Beverley, Cara Elliot, Nicola Cornick, Patricia Rice, Joanna Burne, Anna Gracie, Susan King. Multe dintre ele au fost dintre cele care au participat la cunoscutul lor blog literar comun World Wenches lansat în anul 2006 și inițiat de Mary Jo Putney. O carte atât de reușită încât merită citită într-un weekend indiferent de anotimp.

Sandi Layne says

I won a copy of this book from the publisher in a Goodreads drawing and will be reviewing three of the short stories herein for Steamy Guys After Dark.

Wench in Wonderland

For Wench in Wonderland, the premise is simple: Damaris Bedloe, Our Heroine, is companion to her cousin, Lady Alice, daughter of a widowed earl. Alice is in love with a man her father does not approve of, so the earl will marry her to a man he does approve.

The problem is, Alice elopes with her own choice of man while on the way (with Damaris) to spend time with the approved fiancé's family.

The other problem is that there is a coaching accident and Damaris is brought in and treated as Lady Alice, future family member, while she pretends to be hazy on the details of how she arrived at this mistaken juncture in her life.

I think I've seen this movie...

What I liked:

The Viscount Adam Trevelyan, Our Hero, is a widower with rambunctious children about and an unconventional and poorly ordered household. He is a good man. Not perfect, but he admits his own faults and tries very sincerely to make all the discrepancies about "Lady Alice" work for the good of his understanding and for the betterment of the extended family. He wants to do his best for all those for whom he has responsibility, and I find this highly admirable.

I liked the tone of the story, too. The playfulness of the children, the oddity of Lady Violet, the matriarch of the family, and even the initial absence of Lady Alice's supposed betrothed—all work into the feeling I have that this is definitely a fantasy as the story progresses.

But fantasies end, do they not?

What I took issue with: (possible spoilers)

Damaris's choice not to reveal her true identity as soon as she was conscious really, really bothered me. The impression I had until this decision was made was that Damaris was an upright woman, responsible, and she certainly seems to be so in every other respect. She was waiting for an opportunity to escape at first, but that didn't happen. Then, she seemed determined to take advantage of the situation until she couldn't, anymore, at which point she hoped that the real Lady Alice would be able to find a place for her.

The Steam:

As is often the case in a conventional Regency Romance, the initial attraction between Damaris and Trev (Our Hero and his brother have unconventional nicknames) is sweet and appreciative without being obvious.

A line that really seemed “romantic” for me came from Trev's perspective after the deception had been cleared up:

And yet, he missed her. After the day's events, his insides were hollow. She'd left a hollow where there had been hope and joy. She'd awakened a heart that he thought dormant. The desire for a real family that he'd allowed to seep into him had been crushed, and he saw nothing to replace it with on the horizon.

Whereas this is a sweet line, it seemed to me to carry with it the scent of Insta-Love, that prevalent perfume. Granted, it is difficult to make a complicated relationship work in a short story, but Trev seems to have gone from appreciation of Damaris-as-Alice (his future sister-in-law!) to appreciation of her figure (as she helped rescue a child) to mooning over her, all within perhaps a day or two.

But there isn't really any “steam” as such. It is, again, a clean Regency Romance. Fun and manner-filled and bound by proprieties...even when they are discarded.

It's a sweet story, overall, and it ends with a kiss that curls Our Heroine's toes. All is right with the world.

* * *

Wicked Winter's Night

“It was a stormy night, black as pitch...”

A bit of a variation the the “dark and stormy night” idea, which I confess influenced my reading of the rest of Nicola Cornick's amusing short story about a “fallen woman” who has established herself with some credibility out of the mainstream of English society. It is hard, I know, to create anything entirely new in the Regency genre, so mentioning the “uncle was an absentee landlord” in terms of the raggedy quality of the general neighborhood—and their underhanded “forced guest/patient” scheme—was not unexpected.

However, I love that Cornick flipped a few of the usual tropes on their heads. For example, the hero is the one who is kidnapped!

In this short story, Our Heroine, Lydia, is a Fallen Woman, with a young daughter. Our Hero is Johnny, the new Baron Newcastle, whom Lydia has known her entire life. It is a tale of unspoken love, some misunderstandings, and a sweet, sweet couple underneath it all. There's a hefty amount of backstory covered between Johnny and Lydia, but there is mutual respect between them, and long-held affections. We get to see into both their minds, so that's helpful, and though they both have their "pasts" to manage, they also have a future together.

There are some delightful moments shared as Johnny tries to persuade Lydia to accept him in her life.

He had said that he would protect her and it seemed that was exactly what he was offering, his protection...But she also felt more than a flicker of excitement. It slid through her veins like a heady wine, wicked and wondrous.

Of course, in the Regency era, a man's "protection" generally meant that he would set her up as his mistress. In this case, Lydia believes Johnny is offering such an arrangement to her, as well as Johnny providing a home for her daughter that would be safe. He kisses her, and she welcomes it, until...

"No," she said. "No, I can't do this."

Johnny ran a hand over his disordered hair. He was looking less than his usual immaculate self. "I thought you seemed to be managing quite well," he murmured.

"I can't be your mistress," Lydia stated baldly.

Johnny looked disconcerted. "I wasn't aware that I had asked you."

"You implied it," Lydia said. "You said there was a price for your silence."

She saw the understanding break in his eyes. "I am flattered that you were prepared to consider it for even a moment, but..."

Mortification crashed over Lydia in a wave. She closed her eyes. "I misunderstood, didn't I?"

"I fear so." He was trying not to laugh, damn him.

His actual proposal comes shortly hereafter...but Lydia is quite the stubborn female. I would encourage anyone who enjoys this playful type of story to give this one a read. It's quick and entertaining and will leave you with a smile.

* * *

She Stoops to Wenchdom

Opening at a holiday ball, Mary Jo Putney expeditiously puts us in the time and mindset for this short romance. We are introduced to Lucy Richards, Our Heroine, with dispatch. This daughter of a vicar is quick to sketch out the character for Our Hero, Gregory Kenmore, through the loving memory of Our Heroine as she tells her friend Chloe just why she, Lucy, is still in love with the fellow.

When they are re-introduced to one another, Lucy is mortified when Gregory seems not to remember her in the slightest. However he, in a brief glimpse we are given, remembers her far too well and feels unworthy “to touch the hem of her gown.”

Jane Austen, in *Sense and Sensibility*, said of Edward Ferrars that “Nobody minds having what is too good for them” when he reflects upon Elinore Dashwood. Here, Putney eschews that Austenian philosophy by making Captain Kenmore want to protect angelic (in face and spirit) Lucy because she is too good for him. Then, the author strategically leaves all the juicy revelations for later.

It is rare that secondary characters get a lot of screen time in a short story, but Putney brings us Chloe, the daughter of a baronet, who is a dear friend of Our Heroine. Chloe is more than a sounding board and audience-stand-in for Lucy’s thoughts; she’s actually a rationale female who gives Our Heroine sound advice, presenting the kinds of thoughts we would want to share with the average romance heroine were we given the opportunity.

Faced with a racy report of what her beloved captain is up to, Lucy Richards angrily concocts the daring scheme mentioned in the book’s summary: She pretends to be a saucy wench at a local tavern in order to garner Gregory Kenmore’s attention. Sensible Chloe advises Lucy to be careful, but she responds thusly:

“I’ll be as careful as I want to be.” This is hardly reassuring.

It is, however, effective.

Putney’s dalliance with the “mistaken identity” trope is a sweet one. I am vastly sympathetic with Our Heroine—who becomes the tavern wench “Lacey”—as the story progresses.

We also grow to sympathize with Captain Kenmore. War is wounding to the psyche. My own husband is a combat veteran and I know this to be true. But during the Christmas season, with the influences and care of friends and family, Gregory Kenmore is better able to come to grips with his past and his present, to the point where he is able to think about the future.

And when he does, he finally sees who the tavern wench truly is.

This is a sweet romance, heartwarming and topical for the Regency Era as well as our own. Highly recommended.

Cindy says

It used to be a publisher would take 2 or 3 novellas & bring them out for Christmas. You'd have stories that were short, but somewhat satisfying in character developement & content. Now you have EIGHT very short

stories stuffed into ONE book!! Not very satisfying at all. I give this book 3 stars for the 3 or 4 stories I most liked.

Mary Jo Putney - 3 stars. interesting story, but TOO short!

Jo Beverley - 4 stars. She finds it very difficult to write a boring story! You never know what Ross is thinking in this story. Will he go for our heroine whom he's known all his life, or the boring self-righteous prig? She wraps it up nicely at the end.

Joanna Bourne - 2 stars I guess. It was unbelievable to me that a young woman thrown out on the street in London would find a job in Whitechapel -- SCRUBBING FLOORS? Is that a euphemism for being a prostitute, or did the author really think savvy readers would swallow it? I didn't actually & plus the villain was obvious.

Patricia Rice - 3 stars The mistaken identity with a little amnesia (short lived) has been done to death, but it could have been a better story if it wasn't so SHORT!

Nicola Cornick - 2 stars. I couldn't really get into this story. It just didn't ring true to me.

Cara Elliott - 1 star. A waste of pages that could have been given to the other authors to make their stories longer. Totally unbelievable & ends so abruptly I got whiplash!

Annie Grace - 4 stars. Now THIS story is the story that the author should have saved for a full length novel! I enjoyed it, but was frustrated by how SHORT it is. Too bad, because I really liked it.

Susan King - 3 stars. Another too short story. I appreciated that author didn't make her hero & heroine stupid. I actually liked them. I just wished they had more story development. it was TOO short!!!

Another irritating thing is the fact that this supposed to be a collection of Christmas stories. For almost all the stories in this book, Christmas is just kind of tacked on.

Amy says

'She Stoops to Conquer' by Mary Jo Putney : Hometown good girl disguises herself as a serving wench, fooling her long lost love who's back from the war. He longs for the good girl but is drawn to the wench. Rather hard to fathom that he would be so easily duped, close up, but no one is hurt by the deception and love wins in the end. A sweet story.

Jo Beverley's 'Miss Brockhurst's Christmas Campaign': Sour grapes and nasty behavior on the part of a woman who made a bad choice in the past. She is no lady, and hardly deserves the good that comes to her in this tale. Zero stars.

'Intrigue and Mistletoe' by Joanna Bourne: A well done spy mystery that is surprisingly deep, and funny, too.

Patricia Rice's 'Wench in Wonderland': Lady's companion injured in a coach accident is mistaken for viscount's sister-in-law-to-be. Initially hiding her awareness of the deceit to protect her lady, she sticks around after developing feelings for the lord and his children. A tender tale.

'On a Wicked Winter's Night' by Nicola Cornick: Woman left behind gives her once-rejected childhood

friend another chance.

Cara Elliott's 'Weathering the Storm': Man (spy) and woman (debutant?) both need to get somewhere in a hurry. He nabs a boat he can't sail; she can't afford the boat but is an expert sea-woman. A match made in heaven...except they're both irritating. Meh!

'The Mistletoe Bride' by Anne Gracie: Rich man just wants a wife so he can get his inheritance. His creepy man of business suggests "buying" a dying woman to fit the role. Instead, he gets the lady with whom she rode into town. Very, very odd and dirty-seeming.

Susan King's 'A Wilder Wench': A classic bad girl/good man combo. Of course, he's not as uptight as he seems, and she's not as far gone as she could be.

Ilze says

Jo Beverley's story is very good (4+ stars), Mary Jo Putney's and Anne Gracie's stories are pleasant enough but too short (3 stars), but Joanna Bourne's is very hard to follow (2 stars). Susan King's and Cara Elliott's stories are delightful, given the short format, and so are Nicola Cornick's and Patricia Rice's - 4 stars for all of them.

Maria Nane says

Din toate cele 8 povestioara numai una singura nu mi a pl?cut... restul îns? sunt dr?gu?e si de sezon. Ce mi as fi dorit la vreo dou? dintre ele sa fi citit mai mult, sa fi fost c?r?i de sine st?t?toare îns? a fost bine si asa.

Desi says

Great collaboration. All are acceptable stories and some were quite grand or sweet. It is rare to have an anthology where only one or two of the tales were a struggle to get through. Definitely worth purchasing.

Becca says

While I love many of these authors on their own, I just cannot seem to like their Christmas collections (I didn't like The Last Chance Christmas Ball either).

This collection had the unfortunate theme of all the inns had "wench" in the title and there was a focus on wenches which I got tired of very quickly.

I thought Mary Jo Putney, Patricia Rice, Cara Elliott, and Anne Gracie had decent stories, but nothing that got me swept up in the holidays or hurrying to pick this up again. I'm finding that I like novellas but not short story collections. All of these authors are very talented, but I just don't like this style and wouldn't recommend it, especially as a way to gauge whether you'd like these authors' novels.

My notes:

-Mary Jo Putney has a nice writing style and while I thought the characters were foolish, it was easy to get

through.

-Jo Beverly's was also easy to read, but I thought the heroine was a prideful, spiteful, pain in the rear who didn't deserve the ending she got. I do not like catty, judgmental heroines.

-Joanna Bourne novel was a NO for me. I hated the overly descriptive, abstract writing style from page 1.

-Patricia Rice's was probably my favorite. It seemed an improbably love story for so few pages, but it had the most spirit, fun kids, and was between older characters who ended up "courting" at the end, not declaring undying love.

-Cara Elliott's was different. I found some of the seafaring language to be a bit tiresome after a while to translate, but the story itself was unique and had a kick-ass, totally unconventional heroine and not-so-stuck up lord. With such different people I just had a hard time believing in a long term HEA.

-Nicola Cornick's writing, like Bourne's, was too over the top for me. I am not a big reader of flowery language though some might like the clever similes and such.

-By the time I got to Anne Gracie's novel, I couldn't do it justice. As always, her stories are "cozy" but I was suffering from short story fatigue. I probably would've enjoyed this more had it been more towards the beginning. This one actually had love scenes in it, even in the short format which was surprising, but not out of place for the storyline.

-Susan King--I didn't read much to have a comment on the story, but there was a lot of brogue in it and I just wanted to be done with the book and didn't want to wade through that so I didn't really read it to give it a fair review.
