



How the Duke Was Won

Lenora Bell

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The pleasure of your company is requested at Warbury Park. Four lovely ladies will arrive... but only one can become a duchess.

James, the scandalously uncivilized Duke of Harland, requires a bride with a spotless reputation for a strictly business arrangement. Lust is prohibited and love is out of the question.

Four ladies. Three days. What could go wrong?

She is not like the others...

Charlene Beckett, the unacknowledged daughter of an earl and a courtesan, has just been offered a life-altering fortune to pose as her half-sister, Lady Dorothea, and win the duke's proposal. All she must do is:

- * Be the perfect English rose [Ha!]
- * Breathe, smile, and curtsy in impossibly tight gowns [blast Lady Dorothea's sylph-like figure]
- * Charm and seduce a wild duke [without appearing to try]
- * Keep said duke far, far from her heart [no matter how tempting]

When secrets are revealed and passion overwhelms, James must decide if the last lady he should want is really everything he needs. And Charlene must decide if the promise of a new life is worth risking everything . . . including her heart.

How the Duke Was Won Details

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From Reader Review How the Duke Was Won for online ebook

Sarah says

THIS REVIEW IS SPOILERS ONLY!!!!

I read this as part of my, and Nenia's , plan to clean out our Kindles (except that I actually borrowed this from the library just so that I could take part in another BR, I **love** BRs).

23/10 - This was very 'Regency Bachelor' in plot. The hero, James, Duke of Harland, needs to marry because he's unexpectedly become the duke, rather than the spare he was born as, and the duke *can't* be wife or heirless. He can't decide which of four eligible ladies to choose - they all have financially and politically useful fathers and are all relatively pretty - so he decides to invite all of them (and their mothers) to his estate to let them battle it out for the honour of winning his hand. Very Bachelor-ly!

Our heroine is actually an imposter bribed into taking the place of Lady Dorothea Desmond in the line up of hopeful brides-to-be. The real Dorothea is sailing back from a trip to Italy and so, not available to battle it out for the position of duchess. So her mother bribes her illegitimate half sister, Charlene (historically accurate, this is not), into taking Dorothea's place with instructions to seduce the duke into a compromising position which mother will walk in on in order to force him into proposing. If she is successful, Lady Desmond will reward Charlene with \$1000 pounds to pay off her debts and an introduction for Charlene's consumptive sister (Lulu) to an elderly artist who needs an assistant/apprentice due to failing eyesight.

Some of Charlene's antics to get herself more noticed by Harland are quite amusing, especially as a couple of them sound just like what the gossips from other historical romance books whisper about as being the scandal of the season - a too tight dress nearly causing a nip slip (NOT what the book called it, it wasn't that anachronistic), everyone going in the drink during a sedate paddle down the river leading to some seriously scandalous undressing of the ladies to avoid catching the dreaded 'chill', culminating in Charlene seducing Harland with Lady Desmond literally pushing her into his arms (she and the maid got Charlene all dressed up in an 'accidentally' seductive wrapper and nightgown that tempted more than it concealed).

The main problem came when Harland worked out (mostly due to Charlene's expression and Lady Desmond's unexpected appearance in their secluded 'love nest') that 'Dorothea' and her mother had been in on the plot to force his hand all along. He wasn't happy about that, despite the fact that only seconds earlier he'd been contemplating how to propose without any prompting. Lady Desmond whisks 'Dorothea' back to London to prepare for the wedding and Charlene goes back to her sister and mother (who is a courtesan suffering from some kind of consumption-like illness of her own) safe in the knowledge that she can now pay off the debt her mother incurred when she first opened the brothel she owns and that Lulu will be safe from the knowledge of where the three of them actually live (she thinks they live in a respectable boarding house and that the 'girls' who work upstairs are just other residents).

When Charlene goes to confront the man her mother owes the money to it's at some kind of 'house party' that a future hero is hosting, where the girls have been hired to dance for the guests. Grant, our villain, refuses to accept that the debt is paid and threatens Charlene, but Mr. 'hero-to-be' steps in and kicks Grant out of his house. Coincidentally, Harland has decided he can't wait till his wedding day to see his bride again and attends the same party, which happens to have been thrown by a childhood friend of his. Guess what? Harland finds 'Dorothea' consorting with consorts and is shocked and horrified by the idea that his future wife isn't the respectable woman he needs his duchess to be. He drags her away for a serious talking to which

leads to some serious sex - that's great, but he still thinks she's Dorothea and that they now need to get married even quicker than before (possible babies and all).

The next day has Charlene meeting the real Dorothea and giving her an update on what transpired between her and Harland so that Dorothea won't give herself away (at least not before the ring's on the finger and he's stuck with her). I was surprised by Dorothea, she was pleasantly unlike her mother or most of the other Regency Bachelor contestants (Alice was also nice and will make a worthy future heroine). Charlene and Dorothea give each other the highlights (or lowlights) of their life stories and Charlene impresses upon Dorothea that Dorothea must marry the duke as she's not respectable enough (I hate to think what the gossips will say when they find out that the duke married a prostitute's daughter).

So, on Charlene's insistence Dorothea goes ahead with the wedding, or at least attempts to, but then Harland starts to suspect something (her voice was all wrong) and she can't go through with it. Dorothea's confession sends Harland dashing off to the brothel to confront this lying, cheating woman who played him for a fool. But guess what he walks in on? Grant in the process of branding Charlene in an attempt to 'break her' as punishment for the way she humiliated him at that house party and the fact that she was attempting to escape his clutches and take her mother along with her. Harland charges in and gets into a brawl with Grant's henchman, knocking him out, but Grant manages to grab Charlene before Harland can grab him. They have some words and Grant lets his guard down, giving Charlene the chance to escape him and Harland the opening to break his nose.

Once the bad guys have been tossed outside all the girls congregate in the parlour, giving Harland the chance to meet the whole gang. But then *gasp* Charlene faints, possibly due to the pain of the partial brand on her wrist and Harland has to jump into action. As I was writing this review, I did notice a peculiarity in the locations - the Grant/Harland fight scene happened in the brothel (I just read the scene five times to be sure), then Charlene faints, in the parlour, in the brothel, then it's the end of the chapter. The next chapter starts with

'Maids ran to fetch water. Footmen tore strips of cotton for bandages. The household whirred like well-oiled clockwork, as it had for decades, regulating the lives of the dukes of Harland.'

When did the location change? And why? Why would they go to all the trouble of lugging an unconscious Charlene to Harland's town house? And all without taking the time to perform any kind of investigation of Charlene's wound (as evidenced by the words a few lines down that tell us that only now is Harland using his knife to cut open her sleeve)? That makes absolutely no sense.

Anyway, Charlene recovers from her faint thanks to some herbal poultice Josefa sticks on her arm and the 'who are you really' interrogation begins. Charlene explains all, believing it doesn't matter as he's now a married man. Harland doesn't explain anything (he already explained that he left Dorothea at the altar back in the parlour) which means Charlene thinks he still needs to marry her sister (for the respectability factor), despite that the heart-to-heart leads to more sex, and then some more, and then a final quickie to end the chapter.

The next morning poor old Charlene wakes up alone and this leads her to thinking that this is what it'll be like to be his mistress - secret sex at night, waking up alone because he's gone back to his wife, extreme luxury combined with the absolute shame of being a kept woman. Harland hasn't actually abandoned her, he just went for a gallop to clear his head and come to the realisation that he could marry Charlene and still achieve his political goals. He races back home to disabuse Charlene of the notion that he wants her to be his mistress, pours his heart out to her, she pours her heart out to him, everything is wrapped up so she won't be

that much of an embarrassment to him and they can both continue with their crusade against young women being forced into prostitution due to circumstance, together.

I have no idea why I decided to write a summary of the book and call it a review, but that's what my fingers did when I sat down to start writing this review six hours ago (I did eat dinner in the meantime) - sometimes even I don't know what I'm going to write until the words appear on the screen. That strange location change is almost weird enough for me to drop the rating to three stars - nah, I didn't notice it until I started writing this exhaustive summary review. I enjoyed the story while I was reading it, so the four will stay.

Caz says

If you've looked this title up at Amazon and seen all the "puff" from really good authors like Courtney Milan, Sarah MacLean and Lorraine Heath, you could be forgiven for thinking this is a good book. I know the marketing people are out to sell books, but having people like that endorse duds like this can't but tarnish them just a bit for their fans.

I gave it a D at AAR.

I was only a few pages into reading this début novel from Lenora Bell when I had to ask myself why I'd requested a review copy in the first place. It's part of the book reviewer's job to give new authors a try, but I think that probably the alarm bells should have started ringing the minute I read in the synopsis that the heroine's name is Charlene. In 19th century England. Not only does that appear to be a name that didn't originate until the 20th century, it's not one that has really taken off here. Even the two minutes research I have just done revealed both those facts immediately.

And the rest of **How the Duke Was Won** is littered with similarly obtrusive implausibilities. If you're someone who demands at least a modicum of historical accuracy - or even the briefest nod in its direction – in an historical romance, then is absolutely not the book for you.

Even though Charlene Beckett is the bastard daughter of an earl, she was born and brought up in the bawdy house kept by her mother. Opting not to become a courtesan, she much prefers to do the laundry and sundry other chores than earn her living on her back, and is desperate to protect her fifteen year-old half-sister, Lulu from the clutches of their evil landlord, Lord Grant.

James, the Duke of Harland – also known as His Disgrace (geddit?) - is quite possibly the most unconventional (and I don't mean that in a good way) duke I've ever come across in an historical romance – and I've read a lot of 'em. He is a reprobate of the first order, of course, and only returned to England recently following the deaths of his father – who more or less threw him out and banished him to the family plantation in Trinidad – and older brother. James' ambition is to produce cocoa that is affordable by all (because there weren't enough problems relating to poverty, child labour and social inequality in 19th century England) and to that end, plans to remain only long enough to find himself a wife whose father has sufficient political clout to aid James in his fight to reduce import taxes and outlaw slavery in the colonies. He wants a quiet, demure, biddable woman who won't make a fuss when he buggers back off to the West Indies and only turns up on her doorstep when it's time to get busy making heirs and spares.

And they say that romance is dead.

Or at the very least, and in the case of this book, it's in intensive care and flatlining.

James decides that the fastest and best way to find such a wife is to invite the top candidates to his country house and then make his choice; so along trot four of the loveliest and most worthy ladies of the ton and their mamas, with no concern whatsoever about the propriety of an all-female house party under the roof of a single man.

Little does he know that one of the ladies is an imposter. Charlene is the illegitimate daughter of the Earl of Desmond and is a dead-ringer for her half-sister, Lady Dorothea Beaumont, who is currently travelling home from Italy. Not wanting her daughter to miss out on the chance of nabbing a duke, Lady Beaumont offers Charlene a thousand pounds if she will pose as Dorothea for a few days and then ensure that she and his grace are found in a compromising position so that he will have no alternative but to offer for her.

Charlene wonders how on earth she is going to carry out such a deception, being not at all the sort of shy, retiring young lady the duke is sure to want; but the money will enable her to pay off her mother's debts, to find an apprenticeship for Lulu and to start her own boarding house for young, down-on-their-luck women who might otherwise end up on the streets, so she agrees.

Naturally, from the moment they meet, James and Charlene can't keep their eyes – and hands – off each other, both being struck down with a severe case of insta-lust. Given that the entire story takes place over two or three days, the speed at which the couple falls in love is enough to induce a severe case of whiplash. There is no emotional connection between them and no sexual chemistry to speak of, either.

James is a crusader who believes in fair play and fair pay; everyone in his manufactories, whether in England or Trinidad, earns fair wages, and the instant Charlene stumbles across one of his factory managers trying to molest a young female worker, James has the man by the throat and gives him his marching orders. Both these things are admirable, but, as is the case in the entire novel, the sensibilities are very firmly rooted in the 21st century and the tone is way too modern. Charlene is an independently spirited young woman who insists that she doesn't want to "be owned" by any man – which again is a very 21st century way of looking at the patriarchal nature of the society of the 19th. She also knows Ju-Jitsu (learned from their Japanese bouncer), is a vocal advocate of gender equality, and is able to turn James' illegitimate, mixed-race and temperamental six-year-old daughter into a little angel within hours.

Romance novels are, by their very nature, escapist, and as such are bound to contain elements which stretch the readers' credulity from time to time. This is possibly the case with historicals more than any other sub-genre, because for one thing, there were – and still are – only a handful of actual dukes in England; and while it did happen that sometimes a peer crossed class boundaries and married outside his station, it was extremely rare. So yes, there are going to be various things in historical romances that are implausible or just plain anachronistic, and I am certainly not saying that every book that dares to call itself an "historical" romance should be 100% historically accurate. But there does need to be SOME degree of historical veracity involved, and there's almost none in this book, which has no sense of either time or place. I can accept a degree of unconventionality in an historical, and a good author will be able to craft her stories and characters in such a way as to enable me to suspend my disbelief at whatever liberties she is taking. But in **How the Duke Was Won** the author piles implausibility upon implausibility, stretching the readers' credulity well beyond breaking point, and there is nothing sufficiently engaging in the writing, storytelling or characters to allow the reader to concentrate on something other than the book's shortcomings and is, unfortunately, not a good enough storyteller to be able to paper over the cracks. The characters are flat and uninteresting, the romance is non-existent and it will therefore come as no surprise when I say I'm not going to recommend it.

Mafi says

Estava com vontade de ler um romance de época e peguei neste livro (também em parte porque já saiu o segundo da série). Gostei bastante, não conhecia esta autora mas gostei do que li portanto estou curiosa para ler o resto da trilogia...

Vashti says

Add another to the dnf pile. This book was hard to believe from the moment I started it but I plodded on until I just couldn't take it any more, wasted 88 pages of utter unbelievable nonsense. 1 Star for the 88 pages read.

Pavlina Read more sleep less blog♥♥ says

5 STARS

I enjoyed this book so much! From the moment I read the blurb I knew this book would be fun! And I wasn't wrong, the plot was so good and once I started I couldn't put it down! How The Duke Was Won is a refreshing, funny, sweet, fast paced and sexy story!

I loved the plot and how the story developed with Charlene pretending to be her half sister Dorothea! And James doing whatever he could to resist her. But Charlene's personality was so amazing that no one could resist her!

James is irresistible, he made me swoon all the time! He is charming, protective, arrogant and sexy! And Charlene is his perfect match! I loved her characters so much, she was sweet, fierce, sassy, funny and confident! There are some really steamy moments between them that make me melt and swoon! And there is a lot of tension between them that made me love them even more!

I'm super excited for the next book and I can't wait to read it! I highly recommend it to all the historical fans!

ARC provided by the publisher Via Edelweiss in exchange for honest review

Daniella says

Buddy read with the fantastic Emma!

How the Duke Was Won wasn't able to win us over, I'm afraid, because both my pal Emma and I ended up rating this book two stars. (By the way, if you want to read her review, you can just [click here](#).)

Emma and I agreed that there were certain elements in the story that seemed farfetched, contradictory, and just downright unnecessary.

For example:

1. **Charlene's mother was operating a bawdy house or a brothel.** And yet, it was stated that:

Lulu [Charlene's sister] was still an innocent. She lived in a world of her own creation, intent on the miniature portraits she loved to paint, blissfully unaware of their home's improprieties.

Also:

Lulu was approaching the age Charlene had been when she'd learned the truth about their life. At fourteen, Charlene's life had seemed normal, genteel even. Until the evening when her mother had taken her upstairs, to the Aviary. Where she'd never been allowed before.

Okay, here's my issue with this: I have a difficult time believing that Charlene and Lulu could remain "blissfully unaware" of what was going on with their house. **Especially when the brothel was just right upstairs.**

Moreover, given the nature of the society during the time frame, **wasn't it logical to expect the neighbors to throw some serious shade at the family?** Keeping Charlene and Lulu "blissfully aware" up to a certain point would warrant them being locked away from others.

Now, you could argue that perhaps not everyone knew about the brothel. But hello, this was Regency London, where people had nothing better to do than to get fat, have sex and gossip about each other. I think it's highly unlikely that something as malicious as this could be kept under wraps for so long.

2. **Lulu liked to paint, despite the impoverished circumstances of the family.** Correct me if I'm wrong, but **weren't painting materials expensive** even way back then? How was she able to afford those materials when things were so dire that Charlene was almost forced to prostitute herself to a lecher named Grant?

3. **The brothel's guard was a Japanese man named Kyuzo.**

Fifteen years ago, Kyuzo had escaped from the Dutch merchant vessel that stole him from a fishing village in Japan and forced him into unpaid servitude... Over the years, Charlene had helped the older man improve his English language skills and, in return, he'd taught her basic defensive techniques to safeguard herself...

First of all, I couldn't see the relevance of Kyuzo's character being Japanese aside from being able to teach Charlene Jujitsu. That was his only purpose in the novel. After that, he just kinda faded into the background.

Second, I couldn't even feel that he was Japanese. He spoke perfect English, and Charlene treated him as though he was an Englishman. It would've been more natural if Charlene showed some reluctance to get all chummy with Kyuzo, considering the prevailing attitudes that they had towards non-Englishmen at the time.

4. **The fact that Charlene learned Jujitsu came off as ludicrous and anachronistic.** I got annoyed whenever she would get all Karate Kid on me, saying things like:

*Remember your training, Charlene.
No anger. No fear. Only a gentle, flowing river.
He has no idea that you're ready this time.*

She even attacked the hero upon their first meeting:

She turned her right hip into his thighs and stepped in, catching him off balance with a sweeping throw. Harai Goshi.

There were also inconsistencies with Charlene's characterisation. For example, on loc 246:

Charlene shook her head. "I was raised for... this life. I can't pass for a lady."

But on loc 283, it was stated:

She could act the lady if she had to.

And perhaps **the biggest beef I had with this book was the choppy writing style.** I just didn't like paragraphs structured like this:

He'd lived. Grown a beard. Vowed never to return to England and the father who had shipped him off to die.

Or this:

James had seen too many men sheared like sheep. To keep the lice away. To brand them as prisoners.

Overall, this was okay. The characters were likeable so that's a plus. I'm willing to give the next few books a try, considering that this one was a debut novel.

Mandi Schreiner says

Favorite Quote: *"I'm going to kiss you," he breathed in her ear. "You have exactly three seconds to leave. I*

advise you to leave."

He waited a moment. "Please leave."

(She doesn't leave...there could be hot kissing that follows)

Debut author alert! Adorable book alert!

With his brother and father dead, James has found himself with the title of duke - title he never wanted. As a young adult, escaping London for world travel, he eventually lands in Trinidad and discovers a passion for cocoa beans. After witnessing the atrocities of slave labor on the island, James makes it his mission to have cocoa bean factories that pay fair wages and don't use slaves. But when he is called back to London to take over his family's duties, James is not happy. Nicknamed "The Disgraceful Duke," James decides to find a wife, produce an heir, leave them in London and head back to traveling the world.

He'd spent the last ten years roaming the world, living by his own rules, and he wasn't about to move back to cold, restrictive England and become a narrow-minded tyrant like his father. Instead, James would find a blameless virgin to sacrifice to the gods of Reputation and Respectability, one with a father of ample means and solid political connections, and leave as soon as possible.

He sounds like a real winner, yes? Don't hate him yet - he does have the title of the Disgraceful Duke for a reason. He is a good guy deep down.

He picks four eligible ladies to come to his house (with their mothers) for three days, so he can decide which one he wants to marry. Disgraceful.

Charlene is the daughter of an earl, but also the daughter of a courtesan. Unacknowledged by her father, she has grown up in a brothel but wants more out of life. Although her mother encourages her to be a courtesan, Charlene doesn't want that. Her troubles are many: She has a very artistic sister who would flourish if she could just afford to send her to school. Her mother is ill but they can't afford a physician. And, a man who lent Charlene and her mother money, wants payment back - not just coins, but Charlene's body as well. In the past this man tried to literally brand Charlene and with the help of the house's bodyguard, Charlene escaped. She has learned self-defense from this bodyguard and feels like she could take on this man if he shows up again. But who knocks on the door is her father's wife. James picked Charlene's half-sister (Dorthea) to come to his house as a possible bride, but Dorthea is traveling, and unable to make it. Not wanting to miss this chance, Dorthea's mother asks Charlene to pretend to be Dorthea (apparently they look like twins) for the visit, so the duke can fall in love with her, and then when it comes time for the wedding, Dorthea will be back home and can slide into place. Dorthea's mother offers one thousand pounds, money Charlene desperately needs. She accepts the offer.

This book is so cute. First we start off with a duke who could care less about a title. He could care less about finding a wife. He just wants to pick someone and get it over with. While he isn't thrilled with finding a wife, he isn't super broody or cranky. He is more of a prankster. He likes to push people's buttons or their boundaries and see what they will do. For example, when all the ladies first arrive at his estate, he impulsively dresses as a footman, and stands outside as one, to see how the ladies treat him (not knowing it is him).

He has no problem taking off his coat and rolling up his sleeves. Scandalous!

But Charlene (posing as Dorthea) has her own...eccentricities. While she can just pass as a lady, she grew up with a courtesan for guidance. She has a huge bodyguard who teaches her self-defense. When a footman (cough cough) gets a little handy...Charlene shows him who is boss by taking him down to the floor. This of course gets the duke's attention and he likes this unconventional woman.

"She tumbled me on my arse like a public house brawler," James said.

Dalton sprayed brandy on the library carpet. "We're speaking of Lady Dorthea? That diminutive thing?"

"The very one. Quite a grip on her. Arms like a sailor. Wouldn't be surprised if they were covered in ink tattoos."

Charlene really wants the duke to fall for her, because she needs the money. She doesn't love tricking him and she doesn't love having to act like a lady of the ton. But what she isn't expecting is for James to act...not like a stuffy duke. He has an adventurous spirit. He likes spirited talk. He also has a young daughter he brought home from Trinidad with him, and he has no idea what to do with her. Charlene treats this young girl as a person (shocking!) and helps James realize the kind of relationship he could have with her.

James is struck by lust the first time he sees Charlene. Their romance has great sexual tension and is very steamy.

Like a man who'd been wandering the desert for days, he found the wellspring of her lips, all the reasons he shouldn't kiss her disappearing like footprints in shifting sand.

Her soft, encouraging little moans destroyed his control.

"Dorthea," he groaned into her hair.

He took her mouth, crushing her hips against him, kissing her as if they'd been the last two humans on earth. As if the fate of civilization depended on this moment.

We get to know the other three girls who are vying for James's attention - and the antics to win his heart are amusing.

In the end, James is a kind, warm hero and Charlene is a strong heroine who wins his heart.

Grade: B+

Keertana says

I read this in one sitting, staying up till 2 AM to finish it. It isn't a perfect debut but it's a gripping premise--the illegitimate half-sister of a lady poses as her sister to win a duke!--and the sexual tension is off the charts. I especially enjoyed that there were many historical references in this novel, from issues of child labor to slavery and labor laws explored relatively in-depth for a historical romance. I'd recommend this for anyone looking for a new historical romance author--I suspect I've found a favorite in Bell!

Lover of Romance says

This review was originally posted on Addicted To Romance *Summary*

James, the Duke of Harland needs to find a bride so that he can have a mother for his illegitimate daughter and return back across to America and what he believes to be his home. So he comes up with a plan, for a party involving four potential debutantes that will be all proper and what he needs. He never planned on one of those women being someone he can't resist. Charlene is shocked with a member of nobility offers her security and a place away from the horrid place she has had to grow up in if she poses as her half sister who is in Europe at the moment to convince the Duke of Harland that she is the right choice. So Charlene, desperate to get their debts paid off and see her younger sister can live her dreams, she does what is necessary. But there is one problem, there is some powerful chemistry between James and Charlene and even though they try to ignore the connection they feel, soon the secrets will have to come clean and they will have to choose between duty to family or true love...

The Hero

James, The Duke of Harland never thought that he would be in this position. He was not raised to be the Duke, but when his brother was killed and with his father gone, he is now the rightful Duke. James despised his father and the last thing he wants is more duty and responsibility. Which is why he wants to get married as soon as possible and leave England. He hates the idea of leaving his daughter behind, but he wants what is best for her and finding a mother to raise her is the best thing he can do for her. James is very ducal, he claims he wants someone proper, I like that he doesn't care much about the status of a title. He is generous, is a fighter for liberties and freedom for slaves and is against child labor. He definitely was fun to watch, he isn't your typical Duke at all. He likes to play games and has quite the playful personality.

The Heroine

Charlene was raised in a brothel, with her mother being a "lady of the evening" and has to learn self defense to protect herself against predators. She has devoted herself to protecting her little sister from the truth about their living situation, trying to keep her innocent and encouraging her in her artistic talents. Charlene will do anything for the welfare of her family, even pose as her half sister (whom she has no idea about) and try to be a proper lady even though she is anything but. Charlene is a character you love from the beginning. She is unconventional, independent, willful and lively. I honestly loved her personality, she had this fresh outlook that I gravitated towards. Even though she was a bit too modern for a historical romance I still enjoyed her quite a bit.

Plot and Story Line

First off, I want to say thank you to Melissa @ Lily's Element for loaning this book to me because i absolutely LOVED this one!!! This is the debut novel from Lenora Bell and I have never read a debut novel so well written!!! This was simply an amazing book and I couldn't get enough out of it. The way this story was written, reminded me of those first romances that made me fall in love with the genre in the first place. So Lenora Bell...you have captivated me with How The Duke Was Won. This story involves the secret identity trope and this aspect of the story was written in such a way that was captivating, not too much drama either. It had a very delicate balance that most authors miss when writing with this trope in their plots. The characters especially Charlene and James were simply perfect for each other. Their bantering was pretty contagious, and it was interesting to see how their chemistry was handled; it practically steams from the pages.

"I'm going to kiss you," he breathed in her ear. "You have exactly three seconds to leave. I advise you to leave."

He waited a moment. "Please leave."

Our hero James is trying to resist Charlene. He feels way too much when he is around her, and wants to avoid that with his future bride. But with each day, his resolve weakens and I always love seeing a hero lose the battle to love. We see how torn Charlene is with her charade and a bit confused at times. She isn't your typical heroine, and she bumbles her way along at times and the woman acting as her "mother" keeps encouraging her. Which was pretty funny, because what happens to her is not her fault, just mere coincidences but Charlene is a person that can easily laugh at herself and I liked that.

How odd. It seemed Charlene could do no wrong.

Throw a Duke on the floor?

charming

Expose herself in public?

Too Perfect

She would never understand nobility

The romance that develops between Charlene and James is quite captivating. From the beginning you can just feel "all the feels" practically pull you right in. I only had one issue and it wasn't super strong in this book, but it was there...there were some modern like mannerisms that made this book not feel quite like a historical romance. So that is the one thing I would change, everything else was simply superb!!!

The Cover

Such a gorgeous cover we have here!! I love the pose here, I like how they are so cozy together I like the color of her dress here.

Overall View

How The Duke Was Won is a utterly captivating romance. Its a heartfelt story that tugs at your heartstrings, and pulls at your emotions in a vividly pictured experience...UNFORGETTABLE!

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Lenora Bell says

As Sarah MacLean likes to say, "this reviewer is highly unreliable" :) This is my debut romance novel and the "book of my heart." It's very loosely inspired by the classic tale of CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY (with a dash of The Bachelor and a sprinkle of Cinderella). If you read closely you'll catch some subtle nods to the classic tales. For example, my heroine's name is Charlene Beckett (get it?) and her duke is obsessed with creating the perfect drinking chocolate and he needs an heir to his fortune.

I hope you have as much fun reading this book as I had writing it! I can't wait to introduce the next books in the series which were inspired by THE WIZARD OF OZ and ALICE IN WONDERLAND.

Cheers!

Lenora

Yomi M. says

I REALLY wanted to love this book but I just didn't. Maybe I shouldn't have read this straight after Lorraine Heath's new book, who knows. I thought it was way too silly and I understand that this is fiction and you have suspend reality a bit but it was just way too unrealistic for the times. When I read a Historical Romance book even though it's fiction I want it to be written so that I'm almost transported back to how things were then.

Jedi Kitty says

I moderately enjoyed this book, but in the end skimmed through. I thought it became a bit trite and too perfect towards the end. Main characters: Philanthropic, heart-of-gold heroine who knows jujitsu and grew up in a "bawdy" house. Philanthropic, abolitionist chocolate-making Duke with an illegitimate Trinidadian daughter. This sounds pretty good, but the characters didn't really break many molds for me. The plot-muppet daughter exists to be adorable and make the heroine look like a paragon, the younger sister exists apparently to be a stone around her older sister's neck. I was also a bit annoyed by the philanthropic self-righteousness of the two main characters. Preaching about child labor and abolitionism is an easy way to make historical characters look good, but what is the point of the story if you simply insert modern sensibilities into historical characters? There's no tension or real struggle or sympathy for the rights of these people evident in the book. That battle was won(in England) and the self-righteousness of these characters is so not original. Of course, slavery and human trafficking are still injustices today- but the book does not really make any arguments or take stands that resonate with the modern world. Mostly they just act judgey and declare, "You are wrong, sir! Slavery is evil and must be abolished!" and then go back to romance novel shenanigans. Why make abolitionism a tiny part of this book if it's just window dressing? I feel like that is using the global ongoing struggle against slavery, child workers and trafficking as plot props! (Wow I am feeling very cynical about the world today and making too big of a deal about a romance novel!)

Bindi Boo says

4.5 stars

This was an amazing historical read. Think "The Bachelor" set during historical times with cravats, corsets and bonnets.

Charlene Beckett, a cast-aside illegitimate daughter of an Earl is desperately seeking ways to divert her sure-path as a courtesan and the one way is to find a different career i.e. open up a boarding home for teens seeking refuge and teaching them life skills. She needs to settle her debts with a perverted duke, pay for her little sister's art apprentice and find a good doctor for her sick mother. Enter, His-Disgrace, Duke James Harland- an otherwise unconventional Duke, his need to pass on his heritage is also reaching a critical point. Hence he gathers 4 different women from high society and will choose ONE to be his duchess. A bride he will never love but keep as strictly business. Charlene is paid to take up one spot(and disguise as her look-alike half- sister) and seduce the Duke. She gets the money if the Duke chooses her as the bride.

"The Bachelor" part of the book was hilarious! The antics of the other 3 debutantes were eye-rolling funny. Charlene was an awesome heroine. I loved her confidence and she held her own despite the Duke being a complete ass-hat. James is as most historical romance heroes are- arrogant, charming, handsome however i

loved that he is totally against societal norms and wants to live his life according to his own whim. They obviously fall in love and it was great to see them acknowledge their love without much angst and heartbreak. And that epilogue... *sigh* I LOVE books with great Epilogues, makes the whole reading experience so worthwhile!

Overall, a must read historical romance~

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

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? Read for the Unapologetic Romance Readers **Halloween 2017 Reading Challenge** for the category of: *a romance with a masquerade/costume party* ?

This is a Nenia and Sarah BR brought to you by Kindle Clean Out Club Productions. Tired of hoarding ebooks and *not reading them*? Now, in 200-550 easy steps, you can! No, but seriously, if it weren't for this forum, I'd be *way* more behind on my to-read list. It is The Best. If your Kindle is also out of control, join our group and make us of this forum! I'm always looking for new partners in crime.

First, a disclaimer. I received a free copy of this book to review a while ago. I don't think it particularly biased me one way or the other, since I'm an assh*le and have no problem rating the books I receive - for free - one star, but just in case it *did* bias me, now you know. NOW YOU KNOW.

HOW THE DUKE WAS WON is kind of like a Regency era version of The Bachelor. James, Duke of Harland ("His Disgrace"), needs to get married for business. He decides the best way of going about this is inviting four ladies - and their mothers - to his estate for three days to choose which of them would make the best duchess. Which I guess would make this The Duchlerette?

Charlene - a totally accurate 1800s name that does not scream Dolly Parton-esque country music singer at all, no ma'am - is the daughter of a famous courtesan. The creepy dude the two of them are indebted to, Grant, is about to call *her* in for their debts, and just to prove that he's a total creep, he's tried to brand her with an iron to make her his. Charlene is also afraid for her younger sister Lulu (these names guys, omg) who she is trying to shield from their family's unsavory history.

As it turns out, Charlene is the half-sister of one of the women who's been invited to the Duchlerette,

Dorothea. Her mother, a countess, proposes a *My Fair Lady*-esque transformation, lasting just long enough for Charlene to compromise the duke, thereby landing a proposal and allowing Dorothea to swoop in and claim her regal prize.

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?*

*everything

Most of my friends didn't like this book, which always has me worried. I can definitely see *why* *HOW THE DUKE WAS WON* could rub people the wrong way. It is not on the scale of Lisa Kleypas or Courtney Milan, and the dialogue is rather laughably modern with the characters all behaving in *highly* unconventional ways with no consequences. If you like historical accuracy, the names of the characters alone should have you tossing this down and fleeing the other way.

For a fluff piece, however, it's quite enjoyable. I liked Charlene as a character, with her penchant for martial arts as taught to her by her Japanese bodyguard, her devotion to her younger sister, and her very compelling reason for agreeing to this scam in the first place (Grant is a creep). James was a good character too. He was an alpha male without being brutish or creepy and I liked him a lot. The sex scenes in here are pretty steamy, too. Not too graphic, but definitely not fade-to-black either.

Overall, I enjoyed Lenora Bell's *HOW THE DUKE WAS WON*. I'd read more in this series for sure.

3.5 stars

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I think I have finally figured out what kind of historical romance work for me: rom-com just like with movies. Well, in this case, it's a historical rom-com (a his-rom-com?). Anyway, *How the Duke Was Won* turned out to be quite good just because it was so bloody funny now and then. I quite liked the part of the book when the four ladies and their mothers (or three ladies and their mother, and Charlene and her half-sister's mother) tried to win the Duke's favour and at the same time attacking each other. Had more of the book been as funny as that part had I probably given the book a higher rating.

However, as much as I enjoyed reading the book, was I not overly fond of the constant inner monologue about how the Duke and Charlene wanted to ravish each other. I'm, not a prude, I just get bored with a man

constantly thoughts about wanting to rip a woman's clothes of her body and take her right there. And, the sex-scenes I just skimmed for the same reason. And, here is the problem with me with the book. The last part of the book was not as good as the rest of the book. There was no twist to the story. And, I'm a girl that likes a good twist or two to a story, but the blurb pretty much gives the whole book away. But, still it was a pretty good historical rom-com and I do adore the cover for the book!

So, in the end, I want to say that I enjoyed reading most of the book. It made me smile and I quite liked the main characters. However, for some reason, I found the Duke's best friend Dalton more interesting and I hope to read more about him in another book (And it seems that he will actually be the main male character in the next book). If it is so will I definitely read the next book!

Thanks to Piatkus for providing me with a free copy for an honest review!
