



Once Upon a Christmas

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After a tragic loss, Celia Delacourt accepts an unexpected holiday invitation -- which is, in fact, a thinly veiled matchmaking attempt. For the lonely Celia and a reluctant young man, it turns out to be a Christmas they'd never forget.

Once Upon a Christmas Details

Date : Published October 1st 2000 by Signet

ISBN : 9780451201621

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Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Historical, Regency, Holiday, Christmas, Romance, Historical Romance, Historical Fiction



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From Reader Review Once Upon a Christmas for online ebook

Preeti ♥? (Romance She Reads) says

This was interesting in a sweet and slow burn way.

The orphaned, poor relation h is invited to spend Christmas with a yet unheard branch of the family. Her grandfather was the younger son of a duke who married down for love and so was kicked out of the ducal fold.

The invitation is hardly warm and comes from the present duchess, an autocratic and manipulative woman.

She has an agenda of her own that her son, the H realizes as soon as he receives a quite superfluous urging letter to be home for Christmas – which he's never missed before. Matrimony is the name of the game. He's evaded the trap before but his buddies (knowing the dictatorial duchess) are sure that this time the mama will win – so bets are laid. The affable H is determined to win so he decides to act in a way to put off any ambushing miss he's sure to meet.

The h, by now is cognizant of the duchess' desire of making her the future daughter-in-law (more of a putty-in-law actually). She's suitably shocked as she'd sure the Marquess can get any suitable, fashionable miss from any noble family in the land. Why would the duchess want to marry her son to a poor, incompatible girl from the country – with no family, wealthy or otherwise to back her?

The H reaches home and sets out to make an ass of himself to put off the h but the impression she takes is that the marquess is quite mad in the head and so no wonder they want to marry him off quickly and quietly. A veritable comedy of errors occurs with the pitying h trying to be nice and supportive to him, and the H getting entrapped in a deception of his own making. But I liked their gentle slowburn courting (for all that it occurs within few days) with the doubts on both sides slowly clearing away.

One of the best part of the book was the H's pet cat, Manegold.....

Manegold was not an avid reader, but he approved of any room that contained two fireplaces. The library added to these attractions by featuring pools of sunlight so huge that even a very large cat could fall blissfully asleep, unafraid of waking to find that the sunbeams had moved on and left him shivering in a shadow.

.....who divides his loyalty and foot warming duties somewhat inequitably between the h/H.

"Manegold, down!" said Jack, with mock severity. He pointed a stern finger at the happy animal. "Down, sirrah! Get down at once! Sit!"

But Manegold, in the way of his species, was oblivious. He purred heedlessly on, gazing joyously at Celia. She gave a little spurt of laughter. "He's not a suggestible creature, is he?"

"You've bewitched him," said Jack accusingly. "He's always obeyed me before."

Celia choked. "Clicking his heels and saluting, no doubt."

The duchess is perhaps the third wheel in this romance, pushing and pulling more than the h or H themselves. The rest of the family – the duke and the H's sisters are as aloof, snobbish and useless as the mother. The older sister's cold-ish romance evokes unease and pity.

The romance takes place within 3-4 days culminating on the midnight of Christmas. The cover depicts that scene on the decorated staircase where he invites her to declare his love and to listen to the tolling bells – or

in this case being rung by coached servants hidden nearby.

Sheryl Tribble says

Cover: painful.

Story: wonderful.

Read this back when it came out and thought it good. Still think so. Didn't realize it was connected to another book so now I guess I'll add that to my want list.

Leona says

Enjoyable, but I felt the pacing was slightly off. I agree with one reviewer's assessment that some things were left incomplete, or not worked through properly. But, it was still a very enjoyable read and I thoroughly enjoyed the heroine. For me, her character made the story. She was well written with depth and dimension and my heart went out to her.

Janet says

Excellent Regency and on my keeper shelf for good. Why a "cabin romance"? Because what is Christmas but a time set out of time. Very enjoyable.

Joycelyn says

This is one of the books that I chose while looking for some light holiday reading material. I liked the characters and storyline in this book to the point that I really wish the author had taken more time to develop both. They were both good enough I would have loved another 200 pages.

Ilze says

Very enjoyable story. Some extremely funny situations ensue from the hero's deciding to behave like a lunatic because he thinks the heroine is pursuing him for his money and position, while the heroine, who is not pursuing him at all, actually believes that he **is** a lunatic. The characterization of the hero's cat is spot-on (and how can you not love a hero who appreciates cats?)

(But why on earth did the publishers put such a dorky-looking pair on the cover of the 2000 edition of the book?)

MRB says

Sweet, quick...and fairly forgettable. Celia is a likable heroine and Jack, while not exactly the deepest and most nuanced hero you'll ever come across, is a charming, life-loving sweetheart. We get some amusing dialogue and comedic situations here, though we also have some dialogue and situations that seem to be trying a bit too hard to be amusing and not *quite* making it. The ending had me smiling like a sap even as I reflected that Jack and Celia's connection seemed a bit too much like 'insta-love' to be credible. Given how relatively little space the author has to develop these characters and their relationship, it's worth noting that the H and h don't even meet each other until about 23% through this 200ish page novella and that the entire story spans only a short period of time. Jack's icy, ruthlessly elitist mother is too two-dimensional to be compelling.

Others have summarized the plot better than I can, but in a nutshell: Scared of being married off by his aforementioned shrewish nightmare of a mother, Jack deliberately comes off like a lunatic in hopes of discouraging Celia, his mother's (initial) choice of a bride, from wanting to tie that proverbial knot. It's quite a fun premise, actually---and one I wish the author had done a bit more with.

Overall, I'd say this is definitely worth reading if you get it at a low price and are craving something high on sweetness and charm despite being a bit rushed and low on substance :)

Lyuda says

Charming and heartwarming romance from one of my favorite traditional regency writers.

After a tragic death of her immediate family, Celia Delacourt faces a life of loneliness and poverty - until her distant cousin, the Duchess of Arnsford, unexpectedly arrives to sweep her off to the family seat of Delacourt. Unknown to Celia, the Duchess has ulterior motives. She decided to marry her son off to Celia. Jack Delacourt, the Marquess of Lynden, is well aware of his mother's matchmaking activities, and has no intention of being caught in this particular trap. This leads him to behave coarsely and lewdly, hoping to give Celia a disgust of him. But he finds himself falling in love with her instead while she's convinced that he's insane.

I was actually surprised how much I liked the story. Along with amusing banter, humorous scenes there were some very poignant moments and even some with dark overtones. I went through all kinds of emotions from joy to sorrow, to compassion and a good cheer. Both Celia and Jack are the characters impossible not to love. Even manipulative Duchess whose dominant ways are hard to take at the beginning is multidimensional and you can't help sympathizing with her. There is also a lovely secondary romance that maybe too underdeveloped but nevertheless is tender and joyful. And I would be remiss if I don't mention Manegold, the cat, whose feline personality is perfectly and very realistically shown and whose presence helped draw more out of the main characters.

Overall, it is a perfect book to curl up with and enjoy reading on a winter vortex day with temperatures of -20 degrees (F) outside.

Caz says

3.5 stars

Once Upon a Christmas is a sweet Regency romance that tells the story of a bereaved young woman who is trying to come to terms with the loss of her entire beloved family while struggling to adjust to a new life at the ancestral home of her wealthy relatives, the starchy, autocratic and incredibly proper Delacourts.

Celia Delacourt's father was disowned by his family when he married a penniless vicar's daughter. Nevertheless, he and his wife and children were very happy, until a tragic illness took the lives of all of them except Celia, who was away from home at the time the illness struck. Now completely alone in the world, she is facing an uncertain future. The new resident of the vicarage will not be able to house her, and she has no other living relatives to call upon – until one day, she receives a visit from the Duchess of Arnsford, the strictly correct matriarch of the Delacourt family.

Having nowhere else to go, Celia accepts the duchess' offer to travel to Delacourt, intending to make a stay of only a short time while she explores what other options may be open to her. But the duchess has other ideas and plans for Celia to make Delacourt her permanent home.

What the duchess doesn't make known immediately is that she intends Celia to marry her son, John, the Marquess of Lynden. John has ever been a cause for concern – he is the only one of her children who is not completely under her thumb, and having had no success in matching him with one of the many eligible debutantes she has thrown into his way, has decided to take a different tack. Celia is country-bred, lacks sophistication and is completely different to the young ladies of the ton; and the duchess decides that she will be just the wife for John once she has been taught how to manage a grand house and trained to be as coldly austere and utterly correct as the duchess' own daughters.

Getting wind of this when he makes his plans to return home for Christmas, John – who prefers to be known as Jack – fully intends to thwart his mother's schemes by giving Celia a disgust of him. He arrives at the house wearing the most garish clothes imaginable, and acts like a complete ass, complete with an irritating, braying laugh. A chance remark by one of his sisters causes Celia to think Jack is mentally deranged, and it's this misconception upon which most of the story is based.

It's rather thin, it's true. Even as Jack is fuming over the fact of his mother trying (once more) to interfere in his life, he finds himself captivated by Celia's kindness and generosity and is drawn to her. He very quickly decides to abandon his plan to alienate her, but by then it's too late. Celia thinks he's mad, and even though he tries to set her straight, she persists on believing it and treating him accordingly – with a tenderness and compassion that captivates him even further.

It's a very simple and at first glance somewhat contrived story. But there are some quite dark aspects to it, found most noticeably in the duchess' motivations, both during the story, and at other times during her life. The beginning brings to mind Georgette Heyer's *Cousin Kate* – another story in which an orphaned poor relation is suddenly taken in by her wealthy relatives whose motives are not what they at first seem. Like Lady Broome in that book, the duchess very quickly takes steps to make Celia feel indebted to her, but unlike her, the duchess reveals her purposes to Celia fairly quickly. And then there's the fact that she's a control freak, obsessed with preserving the family dignity and reputation, and making sure that all around her

do the same – and, it would seem, with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Her daughters are as cold and haughty as she is, and the gentle secondary romance in the book – between Jack's sister Elizabeth and a widowed duke - brings home forcefully how much damage has been done to these young women, and how lucky Jack is that as a man, he is able to escape his mother's strictures by simply removing himself from her orbit.

Jack is a funny, charming hero, albeit not an especially deep one. He is, however, quite perceptive towards Celia, and there are some lovely moments between the two of them which help the reader to buy into the idea that the pair really have fallen in love in the space of a couple of days.

Once Upon a Christmas is a light-hearted read that delivers the required quota of good cheer and gentle humour. It's not deep or angsty, but ably fulfils the need for a well-written, feel-good seasonal story.

Jacqueline says

A cute book but not as good as the other book I read by this author *The Fortune Hunter*. Somehow it didn't realize its potential. It was too short and neither of the two romances felt complete to me. A lot more could have been done with the set up of having the heroine think that the hero was mad. And it felt unfinished because we never found out what happened to the plotting duchess.

Anne says

Once Upon A Christmas by Diane Farr is probably the best Christmas novel I have read up to date. What a wonderful piece of work!

I love it when a story makes me feel a lot of different emotions, and when a sad premise is lightened up by humorous situations. In this case, the story starts out sadly. Miss Celia Delacourt has just lost her entire family, and she is taken in by the Duchess of Arnsford, a distant relative, who offers to give her a place to live at her estate, Delacourt. Such a benevolent action is so unusual in the Duchess, that even Celia, who has just met her, suspects an ulterior motive. She is proven right when Her Grace informs her of her plan to reform her country ways, and prepare her to be the next Duchess of Arnsford by marrying her only surviving son, Jack.

The Duchess of Arnsford was already a very intriguing character from her brief appearances in *The Nobody*, but in *Once Upon A Christmas* she became really fascinating. This cold-hearted woman forbids herself to show any emotion or sign of weakness, yet she seems deeply moved by the fact that she wants to see Jack married as soon as possible. She is a very complex character; a good-looking woman, elegant and refined, stone hearted and iron-willed. She never laughs nor cries and she has a natural air of one born to command, but her thirst for manipulation may just prove to be her downfall. The only humane thing about her was her

relationship with her henchwoman, Hubbard. The latter had been devoted to serving her all her life, and I liked that, as the story progressed, their relationship became closer and closer. Hubbard was the only one who really cared for the Duchess.

Celia, who is as kind-hearted and sweet as the Duchess is cold and unfeeling, does not understand her motives for wanting to marry her to her son, who is so above her station, being the Marquess of Lynden and heir to a dukedom. Innocent as she is, she doesn't see that with her quiet country ways, she is an easy tool for the Duchess to manipulate.

Then Jack arrives on the scene, knowing that his mother is plotting for him to marry what he naturally supposes to be a fortune-hunter, and in order to disgust Celia away, decides to act like an imbecile.

Problem is, Celia is mistaken into thinking that he is in reality a lunatic, and instead of being repulsed, demonstrates such kindness towards her "unfortunate cousin" that Jack is not able to keep the pretence for long, and his change of character only serves to strengthen Celia's belief that he is mad! I don't usually like misunderstandings but this one was **hilarious**!

Jack is undoubtedly my new favourite hero. He was so sweet, so kind, so patient, so funny and such a perfect match for Celia! Every scene between them was adorable.

I also enjoyed encountering Lady Elizabeth again, and seeing a slightly softer side to her personality, and the possibility of a happy ending for her too.

I so wish there was a sequel to this book! The ending came so abruptly and I was so sad it was over! I will definitely be re-reading this one again!

Note: *Once Upon A Christmas* is the second and last book of the series *The Nobody*, but it is not necessary to read the first book, *The Nobody*, in order to understand this one. I recommend reading the *The Nobody* first, however, as some circumstances in *Once Upon A Christmas* might spoil the outcome of *The Nobody*.

M.A. Nichols says

I loved this book. It made me feel the whole gambit of emotions and did so without resorting to over-the-top melodrama or ludicrous plot twists. The synopsis makes it sound like a fluff piece, but I found that though the story doesn't include big, sweeping plot-lines, it does have deep characters with interactions and misunderstandings that are genuine and compelling.

The heroine is a great mix of conflicting emotions. At one moment she's tough and standing up for herself and the next, she's vulnerable and emotional. She's a character that rounded and is inconsistent at times. I love that at one point she even makes a characterization about herself to the hero and in his mind he disagrees with it--just like a lot of people, she doesn't see herself accurately.

The hero is a little more flat as a character. I don't think he's as well-rounded as the heroine, but he does provide most of the comic relief in the story. Before he and the heroine meet, he is aware that his mother is trying to set them up and he decides to push the heroine away by making himself idiotic that he would be

unattractive to her. However, while he means to come across as a fop and a fool, she believes him to be truly mentally unstable and treats him as such. There are a lot of great laugh out loud conversations and misunderstandings that are obvious to the reader, but not to the oblivious characters. He's funny and likable, and a great pairing for the heroine.

His mother is fantastic. She is certainly meant to be the villain of the piece, but she's really more of a flawed human who is doing what she really feels is best for everyone, but in reality is so tainted by her "good breeding" and arrogance to really do much good. She's not loving, but she does care about her legacy and making sure that all her hard work lives on after she's gone. And that desire drives her to do things that are not nice. I hate classifying her as a villain, because she's not evil, but she is hardhearted and not a likable person.

There is a subplot surrounding the hero's eldest sister, who is the villain of the first book in the duology, "The Nobody". I really recommend reading that book first. They are in essence stand-alone novels, but the character development of this character stretches between these two books and this book is even better if read after the first. In the first book, the sister is a copy of the mother in this book, but in this story as she's dealing with the idea of being a spinster, she begins to change. It's not a sudden night-and-day shift of character, but she starts to change and become someone better. While she's a sympathetic villain in the first book, in this book she becomes someone you like and I found myself rooting for her. I still wouldn't necessarily want to hang out with her, but she has a wonderful character arc through the two novels.

I just could go on and on about how much I liked this book. Plot wise, it is a light book, but character wise, I found it to be really well written. It took what was great in "The Nobody" and expanded on it (while chopping out the melodrama). A definite 5-stars!

Ana T. says

I had already read another book by Diane Farr when I came across this one. The other book was *The Fortune Hunter* and I really enjoyed it so I couldn't resist picking this one up.

After a tragic loss, Celia Delacourt accepts an unexpected holiday invitation-which is, in fact, a thinly veiled matchmaking attempt. For the lonely Celia and a reluctant young man, it turns out to be a Christmas they'd never forget....

And it was a really nice and occasionally fun story. Celia Delacourt has lost her entire family when she is brought to the attention of some healthy relatives and taken in by the Duchess of Arnsford. The Duchess has an ulterior motive as Celia soon finds out. She wants Celia to marry Lord Lynden, her son, and decides to train her accordingly.

When Jack, Lord Lynden, arrives he suspects his mother has found a new girl for him to pay court to and decides on an very excentric attitude to put her off. This leads to a series of misunderstandings that have Celia believing Jack is mad and that his family just makes him worse. Despite this the two enjoy each other company and soon Jack realises Celia is not the fortune hunter he believed she was.

It was really a very nice story and it was quite fun to see how the Duchess plots to have all she wants happen and how that actually comes about in a different way. It was a nice touch for us to be in on the Duchess's secret, it made her more human. I also really enjoyed the secondary romance and the prospect that Elizabeth

might find some happiness.

Grade: B+

Rebecca (everyday reader) says

Celia lost her whole family suddenly and tragically, and has been invited to visit long lost family by a duchess, who is dying and her family has no idea. She isn't sure what is expected of her in this grand house, but soon finds a friend in her cousin Jack, who she believes to be mad. The duchess means to use Celia to make Jack marry, and to remake her in her own image, but Celia is not amiable to the rude duchess's underhanded plans. Celia and Jack fall in love regardless of any interference, other betrothals come about, and they all realize Christmas is not a time for rigidity. Good read!!

Georgie says

[Jack's sister, Elizabeth (a Miss Bingley of a character) finds life cold and lonely after throwing over her fiancé. She is eventually grateful to marry a widower for whom
