



## Duke of My Heart

*Kelly Bowen*

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## **Duke of My Heart Kelly Bowen Scandal can be handled...**

Captain Maximus Harcourt, the unconventional tenth Duke of Alderidge, can deal with tropical storms, raging seas, and the fiercest of pirates. But he's returned home from his latest voyage to find a naked earl—quite inconveniently deceased—tied to his missing sister's bed. And he has only one place to turn. Now he's at the mercy of the captivating Miss Ivory Moore of Chegarre & Associates, known throughout London for smoothing over the most dire of scandals.

Miss Moore treats the crisis as though it were no more serious than a cup of spilt tea on an expensive rug. As though this sort of thing happened on the job every day. Max has never in all his life met a woman with such nerve. Her dark eyes are too wide, her mouth is too full, her cheekbones too sharp. Yet together, she's somehow...flawless. It's just like his love for her, imperfect, unexpected—yet absolutely true.

## **Duke of My Heart Details**

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Author : Kelly Bowen

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# From Reader Review *Duke of My Heart* for online ebook

## Joanna Loves Reading says

3.5 stars

This was my first Kelly Bowen, and it is very clear that she has talent. This will not be my last. While not a spy novel, it feels like one. It starts with intrigue and that carries through the most of the book. She deftly handles the reveal of clues, keeps you guessing to the end with well-paced twists and turns. The main problem I had was that once the intrigue is resolved, and the story focuses on the love story nearly entirely, there is another twist. This twist felt wrong and was annoying. As a result, the conclusion to the love story did not feel well developed. Since the whole reason we read this genre is the love story, this is a round down situation. This was not a complete let-down. It kept me engaged and interested. I just wish the ending had been handled differently. I look forward to reading more by this author.

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## Caz says

**Is anyone else confused by the choice of the dress for the cover model? The book is set in 1819 and that is most definitely NOT a late Regency era dress.**

I thoroughly enjoyed the books I read in Kelly Bowen's debut *Dukes of Worth* series last year, and had marked her out as a new author to watch as a result. In *Duke of My Heart* she has once again crafted an entertaining story that is well-written and strongly characterised, with deft touches of humour and a nicely developed romance.

Maximus Harcourt, Duke of Alderidge, returns home after two years at sea to discover a dead, naked earl tied to his sister's bed and his sister missing, while downstairs, there is a ballroom full of people gathered to mark Lady Beatrice's come-out. Used to being in control and having every order obeyed, he isn't predisposed to listen to the advice of the lovely, but unfamiliar woman who seems to have taken charge of the situation and starts telling him what to do.

Miss Ivory Moore represents Chagarre & Associates, an incredibly discreet organisation that specialises in fixing the seemingly unfixable, salvaging reputations and making scandals disappear. She has been summoned by Max's aunt, Lady Helen, to prevent the ruin of her niece's reputation as well as to see if she can discover what has happened to her. But Ivory's clients are usually pleased to allow her to handle everything and then pay the bill, and Max makes it quite clear that he isn't having any of that. His sister is missing, and it's his responsibility to find her.

Max and Ivory's relationship doesn't get off to a great start, but once his initial panic wears off, Max realises that Ivory does know what she's doing and starts to trust her. And for her part, Ivory has to accept that Max isn't going to be a typical client who just sits back and waits for results. Even so, the pair continues to clash over methods, with Max generally wanting to rush in all guns blazing, while Ivory wants to take a more considered approach.

Being a third son, there was never any expectation that Max would inherit the dukedom, and so he was never prepared for it. In fact, his parents never bothered all that much about him and packed him off to sea as soon

as he was old enough. But even though the death of his father and twin brothers has brought him a title, he doesn't feel like a duke; he has never felt comfortable in the ballrooms and drawing rooms of the *ton*, loves his life at sea and sees no reason to change it. He believed he was doing the best for his sister and all his dependents by leaving them in the capable hands of his aunt while he pursued his interests elsewhere... but Beatrice's disappearance is the catalyst for his realisation that perhaps what he thought was right for her was no such thing, and for him to face up to the fact that he has been running from his responsibilities.

And Ivory has spent so long bearing her own burdens and taking care of herself and everyone around her that she has almost forgotten what it is like to be able to let someone else shoulder some of them and what it is like to trust another person. Yet part of her longs to be able to share some of those burdens with Max, even if only for a short while, before he leaves England and returns to his former life at sea.

I enjoyed the book and raced through it in a couple of sittings. The premise is different, and both protagonists are complex, well-rounded characters with good reasons for acting as they do. I liked how Ivory was able to bring Max to draw his own conclusions about his deficiencies as a brother, and how Max was able to show Ivory that allowing a man into her life didn't mean she was weak or had to give up her independence (although, of course, it would depend on her choosing the right man!)

But with all that said, there were a couple of things in the story that didn't quite work for me. In the first place, the idea that an unmarried, childless peer of the realm – and a duke, no less – could spend his life captaining his fleet of ships rather than attending to his responsibilities to his estate and dependents required considerable suspension of disbelief; and in the second, while I appreciated Ivory's sterling qualities, her intelligence, her desire for independence and her ability to stay one step ahead of the game, it was another big stretch to believe in her background as a former-opera-singer-turned-duchess-turned-society-'spin-doctor'. Ms Bowen certainly gives plausible explanations for the situations of both protagonists, but I couldn't quite buy either of them.

The ending is also a little weak. Ivory makes a distasteful deal to ensure Lady Bridget's safety, leading Max to ride to her rescue – which he does most impressively. But then his efforts are shown to have been largely unnecessary, which made the whole thing rather anticlimactic. We're repeatedly told that Ivory can handle herself and doesn't need someone to rescue her, but this is a romance, and there are times when it's allowable for one character to save the other. And it's not as if Ivory hadn't already pulled Max out of numerous tricky situations *and* saved his sister, so I think he could have been allowed his moment of glory, just that once.

I went back and forth over the final grade for this book. The weaknesses I've pointed out, plus the general modernity in tone pull the rating down, but those issues are balanced out by the strength of the writing, characterisation and sheer entertainment value. I enjoyed **Duke of My Heart** in spite of its flaws and it gets brownie points for being such a thoroughly engaging read. I would certainly recommend it to anyone looking for something a bit different and definitely intend to look out for the next in the series.

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## Jo says

*"You shouldn't have to be fine, Ivory. You should be free. Protected from things that you survived once and that you shouldn't have to survive again." He brushed his lips across her forehead. "I want to do that for you."*

I *really* enjoyed this book! What I love most about this author is her unconventional and strong-willed heroines, and Ivory did not disappoint.

From the opening scene I was engrossed in this book. Miss Ivory Moore has been summoned to the house of the Duke of Alderidge, and what she finds is a dead, and naked earl tied to the duke's sister of eighteen's bed. Luckily Ivory is in the business of fixing scandals before they become public, and this scene doesn't faze her. She is cool and calm and very in charge of doing what needs to be done.

Captain Maximus Harcourt, the duke of Alderidge, has just arrived home after his latest voyage. He is used to being in charge of his men and his ship, and he has no idea how to handle the scene he finds in his sister, Beatrice's bedroom or the bossy woman who is telling him what to do. How can she be so calm when his sister is missing, and a dead man is tied to her bed?? But because he finds himself out of his depth, he has no choice but to do as the infuriating woman demands, while trying to keep his unexpected attraction to her at bay.

Protecting Lady Beatrice from ruination from the scandalous scene was easy, but finding out where she has fled is the mystery. And Max has no choice but to turn to Ivory for assistance, and with every encounter he can't help but fall further under her spell. Because Ivory is like no woman he has ever met, and finding out her secrets together with his sister has become a must.

I loved the intrigue and mystery surrounding Beatrice's scandal, and what happened to her. It was extremely captivating, and I enjoyed myself immensely.

*"I did a lot of things to survive in my life, things that I cannot apologize for because they have, in the end, brought me here. But I am done surviving that life. I am no longer something to be owned. My destiny is mine to choose, mine to control."*

Ivory is my kind of HR heroine. She has worked hard to get her independence, to ensure the success of Chegarre & Associates. She's no simpering miss, and she isn't shy. She's outspoken and follows her own rules. But she has a big and loyal heart, caring for those down on their luck, and I just loved her. She is an outcast who was forced to work since she was thirteen, taking care of herself however she could.

Max was bossy and so very sexy! In a way he and Ivory had so much in common, because even though he was the son of a duke, he was the youngest son, and had to take care of himself, ensuring his own future. When his parents and older brothers died, he was forced to become the duke, but after years of being his own man, he couldn't fit in society, and preferred keeping to the life he had made.

*"I know who you are. You are Ivory Moore. You are the woman who redressed a corpse to save my sister. The woman who kissed me to save me from myself. You are the only one who understands why I can never be put in a prison that was built for me by fate and circumstance."*

I loved the banter and the chemistry between Ivory and Max. Both of them are so used to being the one in charge, and seeing them fighting for control was so very funny!!! I loved that they were attracted to each other right from the start, and the slow burn of their romance was fantastic! The sexy times only happened later in the book, but the intense build-up of their chemistry worked perfectly for me.

There were so many interesting secondary characters: Ivory's assistants Elise and her brother Alex, and Gil the owner of the Lion's Paw were fabulous characters, and I really hope all of them will be getting their own books.

This was a wonderful HR, with a very interesting plot, great characters and a wonderful romance. I love how this author writes, she doesn't just write about the nobility, but also about the people not part of the society, the outcasts, the ones that had to do anything to survive, and I love that. A definite must read.

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## **Stacey is Sassy says**

### **The Duchess liked giving orders to the Captain.**

I enjoyed *Duke of My Heart* from the very beginning to the very end. The opening scene sucked me in with the surprising storyline of a dead Earl tied with silk scarves to the bed of a debutante. Ooh, kinky. I don't normally expect kinky on the first page of a story, let alone a historical romance. I think the opening scene was even more interesting because we look at it through the eyes of Miss Ivory Moore. I liked Ivory from the first page through the last. She's a strong-minded, determined and intelligent woman who has seen a lot in her life. Taking her knowledge and experience she makes a career out of fixing the problems and sweeping secrets under the rug for aristocrats that can afford her. Her talents in covering up, disguising, hiding out, stashing away and managing to withhold those secrets, has made her services invaluable. This situation with the Earl and debutante will take all her skills, but unfortunately, there is one man who won't get out of her way.

Maximus Harcourt, Duke of Alderidge, has just returned from a voyage to India. He's a Duke, but he's also the captain of *The Odyssey*. He is used to being in control, giving orders and having them obeyed. When he walks into his 18-year-old sister's bedroom, finding the dead earl tied to her bed, he can't believe Beatrice, his sister, had a hand in the situation. Things become even more strange when a beautiful woman starts ordering him about. Their first introduction does not go over well, but he does realise soon enough that the woman knows what she's doing.

Max feels lost and out of control. He felt he'd done the right thing leaving his sixteen-year-old sister with their aunt. Coming home to all of this, makes him realise that he hadn't been doing his job as brother well.

Both Max and Ivory butt heads on numerous occasions but there is an underlying attraction that neither can deny. Ivory has had to learn to manage her life to suit her needs as she knows she's the only person she can count on. Her younger years were spent doing things she'd rather not, just to survive. She does not want to go back to that life. Max devoted his life to the sea after being told at a young age it was the army or clergy for his future. Being the third son, he wasn't needed to learn what a Duke's responsibilities were. Unfortunately, the family duties were foisted on him after his father and twin older brothers died. Instead of returning to London and his duties, he leaves it for his aunt to manage and organise. He never felt comfortable in his role as Duke of Alderidge.

Both Max and Ivory work together to solve the mystery of the dead Earl, where Beatrice escaped to and how she came to be in the situation. Some of the situations they get into made me laugh as Ivory handled them comfortably while Max was completely out of his depth.

Once the connection between Ivory and Max is taken to the next level, neither can deny the feelings that follow soon after. There are some sensual scenes but they are not over the top. The additional characters we are introduced to are very interesting and I would love to see more of their back story and what is in their futures.

*Duke of My Heart* has action, adventure and intrigue which I thoroughly enjoyed. There were times when I thought the characters actions and language were a little too modern for the times, but the storyline and intrigues distracted me enough to overlook it. I will definitely be reading more from this author in the future.

*I received an ARC of Duke of My Heart via Netgalley for an honest review.*

To buy *Duke of My Heart* from Amazon - <http://amzn.to/1SAPJHI>

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## **Francesca the Fierce (Under the Covers Book Blog) says**

### **3.5 stars**

DUKE OF MY HEART is my first foray into Kelly Bowen's writing and I have to say I was pleasantly surprised. The storyline especially because this is like nothing else I've read before. See, the premise of the story is about a woman whose job is to cover up society's indiscretions, for a fee. Miss Moore finds herself at the Duke of Alderidge's home during a party because his sister is nowhere to be found, and there's a dead body naked, tied to her bed. Her job is to cover that up so there's no talk of wrong doing, salvage the reputation of and find the Duke's sister. The Duke though, has just gotten back himself from India as he spends most of his time as a Captain of a ship and has no clue what's been going on back at home. Different, right? At least it was for me!

The pace of this story was good even though at times may have seen a bit slow. There was no major excitement for me but a steady interest. Which is great in its own way. The writing was engaging and the characters were complex and interesting. I did find the solution to this whole mess a bit easy in the end, but nonetheless getting there was enjoyable.

I can't say that either of these characters woe themselves into my heart, though. They were both ok characters but nothing major stands out about them to me to make me remember them later on. There are some side characters that I found interesting and I do think I would like to see their books in the future.

All in all, this was a great intro to this author and at least I'll have one more historical romance author to explore this year!

On a completely separate note and I just had to mention it..... Doesn't the cover model look just like Katie Holmes? LOL

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## **Carol \*Young at Heart Oldie\* says**

I loved **A Duke to Remember**, the second book in Kelly Bowen's *Season for Scandal* series, and knew I

wanted to read the rest of the series. Ivory Moore and her husband, Maximus Harcourt, Duke of Alderidge, were important secondary characters in that book and **Duke of My Heart** is the story of how they met and fell in love.

Ivory Moore has a secret past that only a few trusted associates are privy to. Using only her wits and resourcefulness, she has forged a new, independent life as owner of Chegarre & Associates, an elite agency known for its discreet handling of indelicate scandals. Ivory prides herself on being very good at her job, provided she is in full charge of whatever needs to be done. However, a certain Duke of Alderidge seems determined to make her latest job difficult, with his heavy-handed manner.

*The duke swung around to face her again, those ice-grey eyes impaling her as if she were somehow responsible for this debacle.*

Maximus (Max) Harcourt is a captain first and a duke second. With two older brothers, his parents had always made it plain that he wasn't needed and must make his own way in life, ensuring he brought no hint of scandal to the family name. Going to sea at the age of thirteen, he built a life for himself, one he is unwilling to give up. Since inheriting the title on the death of his brothers a decade ago, he has spent most of his time captaining his fleet of trade ships, leaving his estate in the competent hands of his stewards, secretaries and solicitors. However, having returned home for a short visit, he does not expect to find his sister missing without trace, a dead earl's body tied to her bed and a strange woman giving him orders!

*He'd never in all his life met a woman with such nerve.*

Max is used to commanding his men and being obeyed without question but the cool, calm and collected Ivory is not one to be daunted by this overbearing man. They are bound to clash and clash they do in a scene full of spirited dialogue.

*The duke's expression was positively glacial. "I give the orders here, Miss Moore, not you. Don't presume that I will ever follow your lead."*

*Irritation surged. "Take a look around you, Your Grace. Do you see a crew of sailors anxiously awaiting your direction?" She put emphasis on the last two words. "This is not your world. This is mine."*

*"Get out of my house," the duke said, his voice as sharp as cut glass. "Now."*

Of course, Max is forced to back down because he realises this is a problem he is not qualified to solve and must put his faith in Ivory Moore's methods. Naturally, any reader of historical romance will know that behind these heated exchanges is an equally heated attraction between the hero and heroine.

*Good heavens. She hadn't had this sort of visceral reaction to a man in a very, very long time, and she wasn't pleased. Desire was a distraction, and distractions were perilous.*

*No man with a pulse and eyes in his head would overlook her. She evoked images of dark nights and secret desires—*

As they work together to solve the mysterious disappearance of Max's sister, they come to know each other better. Max appreciates that Ivory is intelligent, clever, practical, logical, resourceful and fearless. Ivory is aware that Max can be hard-headed, arrogant, stubborn and controlling, but she has also seen his gentleness, kindness and deep love and concern for his sister. She senses that he is a man she could trust with her secrets.

They are so consumed with thoughts of each other that Ivory becomes distracted from the job she is

supposed to be doing and misses an important clue, and Max feels guilty for pursuing his own selfish pleasures, when he should be doing everything he can to make sure his sister is safe.

I love how Ms. Bowen builds the sexual tension between these two with heated kisses, longing and unfulfilled desire creating a delicious feeling of anticipation. I love the scene in Max's cabin where they share their innermost thoughts and secrets which creates a wonderful sense of trust and intimacy between them.

*She had entrusted him with a gift. A piece of her past. A piece of who she was. That single gift was the most valuable thing any woman had ever given him. Ever.*

Later in the story when they finally make love, it just feels right. The love scene is beautifully done – tender, romantic and sensual, but also revealing the raw desire they feel for each other.

I admire Ivory for the sacrifice she is willing to make for Max and his family, but I could also sense how vulnerable and alone she feels...

*It was this that she hated. This bleak feeling of exposed vulnerability that reduced her to a thirteen-year-old girl who had learned hard lessons about how one survived when one started with nothing.*

I love Max for being her knight-errant...

*"You shouldn't have to be fine, Ivory. You should be free. Protected from things that you survived once and that you shouldn't have to survive again." He brushed his lips across her forehead. "I want to do that for you."*

and for being willing to make his own sacrifice for the woman he loves...

*"I am willing to try to be a duke. And the brother that Beatrice deserves. But I can't do that if I don't have somewhere I belong. And I belong with you."*

Some of the secondary characters, like part-time actress, Elise DeVries, and her brother, Alex, owner of London's most exclusive gaming hell, are familiar from reading **A Duke to Remember**, as is the dangerously unpredictable King. However, having read book 2 first, King's actions in that book gave me a different opinion of him and I believe that perhaps redemption is possible and I hope Ms. Bowen is considering writing his story. I was also intrigued by the roguish smuggler, Captain Black, who I feel is also deserving of his own book.

The mystery element provided some intriguing twists and turns and I never felt my interest waning. It wasn't until near the end that I figured out the villain's identity and was happy to see him get a fitting punishment thanks to Captain Black.

**MY VERDICT: A captivating story, multi-layered characters and a passionate love story make this a book one I can definitely recommend.**

*Season for Scandal* series (click on the link for more details):

<https://www.goodreads.com/series/1573...>

This review was first posted on my Rakes and Rascals Blog:

<https://rakesandrascals.wordpress.com...>

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### **Tracy T. says**

Absolutely amazing story! LOVED IT! (audible review)

WOW WOW WOW!!! I enjoyed every minute of this book! I didn't want it to end. One of the best historical romance books I have listened to in a long time. The heroine Ivory has to be one of my favorites! Loved her. She was smart, witty, and just wonderful! Loved Max the Duke of Alderidge, fantastic hero.

This is one of the best story lines and plots written for a historical romance. The dialogue throughout the book was fantastic and there was lots of it! I love lots of dialogue.

If you like Historical Romance books you will love this one! I will absolutely look for more books by Kelly Bowen!

As of the narration, I am a fan of Ashford McNab and she did great. She is not real big on the emotion part of her narrations but she has a great reading voice and the men sound like men. Loved the narration.

Just get this book! It does not disappoint at all! love it love love it.

Thank you Kelly Bowen for writing such a wonderful book. I read/listened this book in one sitting I couldn't stop listening!

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### **Amanda says**

*"The careful barriers that she had built around herself were crumbling like a wall of sand in the face of a rising tide. Maximus Harcourt was no longer a client, any more than he was an amusement or a distraction. There was no point in pretending anymore, and with that admission a weight seemed to slide away from her. For better or for worse, this man had become something more."*

3.5 stars

While there was no question that I enjoyed Duke of My Heart immensely, it felt like the book's focus was more so on setting up the series' premise and colorful cast of supporting (and future main) characters instead of the main couple's romance. Surprisingly, this didn't bother me as it usually would have, but also the reason why I couldn't give this 4-stars either. I do have to say that even if the romance had been the more central plot point it wouldn't have mattered because the standout of the book would have remained the same: **Ivory Moore.**

Ivory was exactly the kind of heroine I've come to expect and anticipate from Kelly Bowen; unconventional, competent and full of agency. However, while her heroines do often share many similar traits, Bowen makes sure that they are each unique and special in their own right. In Ivory's case, it was her fortitude. Overcoming adversity at every turn, first when she was seen as little more than an object whose sole purpose was in the pleasing of men and later viewed as a gold digging harlot by her late husband's aristocratic family, Ivory's strength and sense of self led her to become her own boss and more importantly, her own person, in charge of her destiny.

*"She had chosen herself. When Max had forced her hand, had acted like every man who simply wanted to own her, to possess her on his own terms, Ivory had chosen Ivory."*

And what kind of hero pairs wonderfully with a heroine like Ivory? One who is in complete awe of her and loves her for her ability to get shit done, of course! That was Max to a tee. His backstory might not have been as compelling as Ivory's (third son, sent away and all but forgotten by his family, etc.), but he was a very decent man. Adorably huffy and a little too bossy at times, he was A DUKE afterall, Max smartly came to the conclusion that Ivory was his equal, and even his better, in all things.

*"Here was a man who commanded men, who was used to controlling every aspect of his life. Who was used to taking action to achieve his ends. And she was asking him to place that control in her hands. She did not underestimate the significance of that. "I trust you." He hadn't looked away from her. "Thank you," she said softly."*

Together, Ivory and Max were very well matched. They understood each other, such as their dissatisfaction with 'the way things were' in terms of society as well as their constant yearnings to be free from that same society's shackles. Their fervent independent streaks meant that they got under each other's skin in no time at all, to the very hidden depths of their hearts and once that happened, they were goners.

*"You undo me, Maximus Harcourt."  
"I will always come for you, Ivory Moore."*

Theirs wasn't the most feels inducing romance in my opinion, but it was a lovely one nevertheless.

The mystery surrounding the disappearance of Max's sister was a good solid plot that kept my interest as well as helped link the story and characters together. Even more so once Ivory's various ahem, *associates* were introduced one by one. First there was gaming hell owner Alexander Levoie and his queen of disguises sister Elise DeVries, as well as my personal favorite Gilda, the pistol toting redhead (SHE BETTER GET A BOOK!!!). Also appearing was King, the audacious auctioneer of pilfered art and goods, who I imagine would be more anti-hero than hero if indeed he gets his own book (view spoiler). He is ginger-y though, that's always a huge plus in my book. I'd love to see the charming and bearded Captain Richard Black as a main character at some point as well.

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**WhiskeyintheJar/Kyrarkyker says**

3.4 stars

The hero bumbles around a lot and doesn't get an opportunity to shine while the heroine was strong and awesome. Overall, the historical feel was missing for me, not sure if due to how the heroine was living her life or what but I missed it. The hero just wasn't a strong presence for me and the mystery part of the story felt a little vague and over with earlier on. The author's writing is incredibly strong and I enjoy it but I almost feel like she would be a better fit in contemporaries.

Embarrassingly, I spent a good portion of the latter half of the story fantasizing about Beatrice and King having their own book. Or maybe Captain Black and Beatrice, I think either of those two would be an amazing match for her.

Either way, gimme King's book!

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### herdys says

3,5 stars! I really enjoyed this new series and all the wonderful characters that hopefully will get a book too, though there are too many of them lol.

The romance was nice though I didn't care for Maximus at first. I never liked alpha heroes who think they know best. At least he did stop to actually think and realized he needed help from our Wonderful Miss Ivory. Bowen keeps writing such delightful, human and flawed heroines. I wish some of the heroes were as good, or as interesting.

The mystery plot was interesting and had me invested which didn't happen in her last series. So all in all, it was a nice book. It just wasn't amazing, so it isn't getting 4 stars.

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### Caz says

**I've given this a B for both narration and content at AudioGals.**

I had pegged Kelly Bowen as an author to watch last year after I read and enjoyed her second book, *A Good Rogue is Hard to Find*, so I was pleased to see there was an audio version of **Duke of My Heart**, the first book in her new *A Season for Scandal* series. Ms Bowen is an excellent storyteller with a deftly humorous touch, and she has the knack for creating memorable and engaging characters, things she puts to good effect in her latest novel.

You can read the rest of this review at AudioGals.

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### Zoe says

Very promising writing. My problem as always lies with the character. Ivory Moore's character is just a bit too much. She was a superwoman. A famous opera singer, a duchess, a lady-detective. She was resourceful, determined and could do everything better than anyone. At one point I just started thinking wow I am sure she is wonderful and all but she was just too over the top for me.

Max the hero was completely overshadowed by Ivory. He did alright in the beginning but somehow Ivory proved (and needed to prove, in my opinion) that she was just as capable, if not more, as Max. I most certainly respect a self-reliant woman. But like I said, Ivory was too much for me. She might as well play both roles because she was this superwoman and everyone else could just take a break and go home.

I don't think there is much to say about the relationship. Ivory was hired by Max's aunt to save Max's sister. They were attracted to each other. And Ivory kept telling Max to "trust her" and "don't get in the way". She was very very very capable to the point of overbearing. Max really paled in comparison with Ivory. I kind of felt bad for the guy. He couldn't do what Ivory did because Ivory was so great at everything. And he couldn't save his sister because Ivory was better at it. Plus he wanted to sleep with Ivory. This guy was an emotional slave to the almighty Ivory. There is little yearning between the lead characters. It was not some once in a lifetime relationship or love story. Nothing memorable happened. What happened was Ivory pulling off one stunt after another and proved that she was good at what she did.

I am interested in Kelly Bowen's writing though. I hope she tries out different characters and maybe they would appeal to me better.

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## Natalie says

*"I did a lot of things to survive in my life, things that **I cannot apologize** for because they have, in the end, brought me here. But I am done surviving that life. Ivory Bellafiore no longer exists, nor will she ever again. I am no longer something to be owned. **My destiny is mine to choose, mine to control.** Do you understand?"*

Ivory Moore definitely gets on the express one way train to my Favorite Romance Heroines Hall of Fame. I liked the romance too, but this book was all about her and her life she built for herself and the world she worked in that made this book sparkle for me. The above quote is what makes her so special to me. She is a survivor, she is independent, resourceful and will not apologize for who she is and what she has done. I love that. Moralizing things is so usual and boring. Give me a heroine who will not apologize for what they have done to survive a treacherous world.

Ivory is part of a company called Chegarre & Associates, and is basically kind of like Olivia Pope on Scandal, or that's how I explained it to others. She makes scandals in the ton disappear for a price by covering up the indiscretions and coming up with an explanation. Because of this, she crosses paths with many interesting characters that I'm fairly certain will get their own books later in the series. There's **Elise DeVries**, her right hand woman, adept with a rifle, with a gunshot wound in her right shoulder and co-owner of a Gentleman's Club with her brother **Alex LaVoie**, **Gilda** the red headed voluptuous gun toting owner of a tavern, The Lion's Paw, and **King**, the red-gold haired ostentatious owner of a private and exclusive auction house. Not sure if Captain Black will be one of the future characters to get a story, we'll see.

Anyway Ivory is hired by Lady Helen Harcourt, the spinster Aunt of Maximus Harcourt, the Duke of Alderidge because Beatrice, Max's sister has disappeared from her own ball and left a dead Earl in her bed naked and tied up. It sounds saucier and more scandalous than it is lol. Max comes back coincidentally after a voyage, he's a sea captain and is thrown into this madness without warning. While trying to find Beatrice, Max and Ivory obviously become attracted to each other. What I liked about this book was that they always prioritized finding Beatrice first. I like that they were attracted to each other and handled it in a very mature manner (although I'm not opposed to swooning high drama emotions, god knows I love those type of books lol, but in this case, no).

I liked that the mystery was solved with enough of a chunk of the book to explore the internal issues between Ivory and Max. Ivory and Max are two very similar, very independent people who have built walls around themselves by relying only on themselves.

*And that was the crux of it all. What she had built here in Covent Square represented her freedom. Represented her independence. She'd become her own woman, relying on herself, providing for herself at the mercy of no man.... There could be no future for her and Max. They were too much of the same. Too unfettered by the constraints of a world that would see them tied by tradition and expectation.*

For Ivory, she grew up poor, and was sold by her parents to a man who nurtured her talent for opera singing and turned her into a legend on the stage and it is implied that she also played courtesan to survive. Then she met the Duke of Knightley, who was much older than she was, and he took her under his wing, married her and gave her a new skill set to survive. It's implied she helped and learned from him in collecting secrets and information to become that good at her job now. But after the Duke died 5 years ago, she got thrown out of the ton by his family since she was considered beneath the ton. So it's of supreme irony that she's the one cleaning up all their messes. ANYWAY. Ivory is amazing amazing amazing and the book doesn't just tell you this, it shows you how good she is at negotiating with all the tricky people who live in the London underworld that she has to deal with, and how quick thinking she is.

Max's story is simpler and easier, because he's a dude. Basically he was the 'spare' after his twin older brothers, was shipped off to boarding school at six and went to sea at 13 to become a seaman since he wasn't needed by his family. But then his brothers and parents died and he became a duke. But because he was never part of that world he couldn't just become part of that world. So that's why the story draws the similarities between Ivory and Max. Max was a pretty great hero. I will consider putting him as one of my favorites when I do re-reads. I loved that Ivory and Max had a really mature relationship where he saw her as an equal pretty early on and backed down and let her do her job.

The last part of the book I loved because it's about them coming together and working out how they could be together and stop allowing their fears and independence drive each other away. (view spoiler)

*She had chosen herself. When Max had forced her hand, had acted like every man who simply wanted to own her or possess her on his own terms, Ivory had chosen Ivory.*

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## **Keri says**

Kelly Bowen continues to bring a fresh voice to historical romances and this Regency romance is no exception. Chegarre and Associates is whom the TON calls upon when they have some issue that they can't deal with in a normal fashion. You know someone dies in your bed that isn't your husband, give them a call and let them handle all of your hide-the-body or disguise-the-truth needs. That is exactly what Maximus Harcourt comes home to. Ivory Moore helping Max's sister and aunt hide the body in his sister's bed. WTF??? Kelly Bowen's ladies are always smart, capable and ice cold under pressure and Ivory is certainly living up to that credo. Except when she gets close to Max, then she starts to heat up in unexpected ways. If you haven't read KB, then this is a perfect book to start with, as this is first book in a brand new series.

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## **Mei says**

What a wonderful book!

And what an interesting couple! I loved both of them!

A very unusual story with a very unusual heroine who knows what has to be done better than the hero! Very, very interesting!

Bravo Ms. Bowen!! An very good and interesting romance with just the right amount of action and intelligence!

I'm looking forward to the next book in the series!

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