



The Earl

Katharine Ashe

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How does a bookish lady bring an arrogant lord to his knees? Entice him to Scotland, strip him of titles and riches, and make him prove what sort of man he truly is.

Opposites...

Handsome, wealthy, and sublimely confident, Colin Gray, the new Earl of Egremoor, has vowed to unmask the rabble-rousing pamphleteer, Lady Justice, the thorn in England's paw. And he'll stop at nothing.

Attract.

Smart, big-hearted, and passionately dedicated to her work, Lady Justice longs to teach her nemesis a lesson in humility. But her sister is missing, and a perilous journey with her archrival into unknown territory just might turn fierce enemies into lovers.

The Earl Details

Date : Published October 25th 2016 by Avon

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Author : Katharine Ashe

Format : Kindle Edition 352 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review The Earl for online ebook

Emily S. says

DNF - I hated the heroine. Hated her. Maybe if she could shut up long enough to remove the huge chip from her shoulder and the stick up her arse, things would have been different. As it stands, NO.

Ang says

Worth the Wait!

This is the conclusion of the Falcon Club series, the middle book in the The Devil's Duke trilogy, and for Falcon Club series fans, worth waiting for. I do not recommend reading this out of order as it is best read with the others in the series, but you could definitely pick it up anew and enjoy it immensely. The Falcon Club series has been so spread out that I can hardly remember what occurred in previous books but did not find myself lost at all which is so refreshing. The last thing a reader wants to do when they pick up a book is feel like they have to re-read five previous books to be able to continue with a final installment.

Now, there is a huge reveal in this book...the long awaited identity of Lady Justice who has colored each book with her sartorial wit and human perspective of the woes of the downtrodden of England.

She has amassed quite a following in the years she has published her pamphlet and created quite an adversary (object of attraction?) in Peregrine, the Secretary of the Falcon Club to which she has directed much of her ire. The reveal is not a super big surprise to me, but either way, it is welcome because she is a character I have liked and whose spirit is contagious as you want her to win whatever she is fighting for. The fact the she and Peregrine have history is an interesting element to the story and creates the tension needed for the story to have the depth that it has.

There is a ton of adventure in this story which is very enjoyable and has the reader turning the pages, not wanting to put the book down. I loved the mistaken identity storyline that creates another underlying tension to the story that had me wondering how on Earth the story was going to find completion.

The love story elements make for a wonderful connection between the two characters that their ultimate, inevitable collision is sweet, sensual and sacred. There is a loveliness that is to be savored between them, a breaking down of barriers long built and the reader wants everything to last...but of course, that is not to be!

Read this book - you will love it! You will want more as I do and I cannot wait to read the last in the Devil's Duke series and more of Katharine Ashe's books to come.

ARC provided by Net Galley - Many Thanks!

Amy Quinton says

I've read all of Ms. Ashe's books, and in my opinion, this one is her best. Incredible tension, believable love between the main characters, and a healthy dose of feminism :) - I cried tears of joy before the end and read it all in one sitting! This one is a keeper and one for the Favorite's shelf!

Paige Bookdragon says

3 stars even though it's a DNF because I'm feeling generous.

Lol, no seriously, DNF because it's the author's way of writing that didn't really clicked with me and the story seems to drag on and on and on.

I think the plot is really good and this would have been a favorite if I was able to get past the author's way of writing.

Do check this out though. This might work with you.

Alyssa says

3.5 stars.

Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog

The Earl by Katharine Ashe
Book Two of the Devil's Duke series
Publisher: Avon
Publication Date: October 25, 2016
Rating: 4 stars
Source: eARC from Edelweiss

Warning: this is an adult book, and for the eyes of mature readers

Summary (from Goodreads):

How does a lady of wit and courage bring an arrogant lord to his knees?
Entice him to Scotland, strip him of titles and riches, and make him prove what sort of man he truly is.

Opposites...

Handsome, wealthy, and sublimely confident, Colin Gray, the new Earl of Egremoor, has vowed to unmask the rabble-rousing pamphleteer, Lady Justice, the thorn in England's paw. And he'll stop at nothing.

Attract.

Smart, big-hearted, and passionately dedicated to her work, Lady Justice longs to teach her nemesis a lesson in humility. But her sister is missing, and a perilous journey with her archrival into unknown territory just might turn fierce enemies into lovers.

What I Liked:

This book, for me, was better than *The Rogue*. I had an easier time reading and digesting this one. When I read *The Rogue*, I was disappointed, and I didn't love the book. I have not read any of the Falcon Club books. This novel, focusing on Colin Gray and Emily Vale, was heartbreakingly and uplifting, infuriating and undeniably romantic.

Colin Gray is the new Earl of Egremoor, after the recent passing of his father. He was the secretary of the Falcon Club, which has been disbanded. When his nemesis, Lady Justice, calls for his help, he is curious, and does not refuse. Emily Vale's sister is missing in Scotland, and she will do anything to find Amarantha. Even if that means calling on Peregrine, the secretary of the Falcon Club. But Emily realizes who Peregrine really is, and decides that she has no need for his help. But Peregrine - Colin - is determined to help Lady Justice (he doesn't know her true identity). By chance, Colin and Emily meet in an inn in Scotland, looking for the same person (though Colin does not know this). They have been avoiding each other for years, but this journey is inevitable, and completely necessary.

The first thing I want to point out is that the synopsis is not quite accurate. Emily does not lure Colin to Scotland, and he is not stripped of titles and riches. Not exactly, anyway. In Scotland, he and Emily have to flee hastily (there are highwaymen pretending to be them), and they do not have any of their belongings with them. So it's not exactly as the synopsis says - it's not like Emily strips Colin of anything. And Colin isn't actually stripped of anything. If that makes sense.

Anyway! I had a much better time reading this one, compared to *The Rogue*. Emily has hated (or tried to hate) Colin for about eighteen years, since she was eight and he thirteen. The reason is ridiculous, and the whole grudge she has is ridiculous, but I can sort of see why she would harden her heart against him, at age eight. Sort of. I remember being eight.

I loved Colin, infinitely more than Emily. This surprises exactly no one, because with *The Rogue*, I loved Saint and haaaaated Constance. In this case, I like Emily, but I adore Colin. I was almost bawling, while reading the prologue. Colin has been hurt and broken in a number of different non-physical ways, since he was a child, and my heart hurt for this fictional character. In the story, he is somewhat emotionless and empty and hard, but utterly selfless and duty-driven. Also, he has a nibbleable jaw. I got a good visual in my head - and I must say, the cover model does him justice.

But back to the man. Gah! He's a swoony hero for sure. I think he deserved more and better, but I liked seeing him work through the past, suffer a bit (I know!), and then get rewarded for everything (in a sense). He's so honorable and so selfless. I could look past his occasional silly remark about this or that, because he's a very true male protagonist in this time period.

Emily... is equally complex but not as likable (to me). She's an independent eldest daughter, and in this time period, that is a bit odd. She writes political pamphlets under Lady Justice, and no one, save a few servants, know who she is. Emily is a bit snobby when it comes to Colin, and she's been holding a stupid grudge for eighteen years. Sometimes I questioned her judgment and her sanity, other times I was rooting for her and

her brazen opinions.

Together, the two are fire and ice. There was just the right amount of push and pull between them. It wasn't just Colin chasing after Emily, or Colin constantly apologizing to Emily, or moping or begging, etc. No, Emily did her fair share of apologizing and realizing that she was being stupid and understanding that she hurt him, that he hurt, that he isn't invincible or perfect.

I got punched in the feels soooo many times during this book. The interactions and dialogue between these two characters were so well-written, and sometimes, my heart hurt for them. They hash out a lot about the past, and their anger at the other, and sometimes I wanted to just force them together and have them work things out. I do like how they worked through things as the story progressed, and not all at the end, or something concentrated like that.

So I did like the romance - it was hot and cold and sweet too. The chemistry between these two was there, and constant, smoldering in the background. Ashe's romance novels are never a smoke show, but I like how intimate they can get.

So, overall, I enjoyed this book. I'm quite happy about this, because I remember feeling incredibly sad and a bit mad at myself for not loving The Rogue. With that book, I felt like I needed to love it (perhaps my expectations were too high). With this book, I expected to dislike it (after reading various earlier reviews), but I ended up liking it.

What I Did Not Like:

While I didn't dislike Emily like I disliked Constance, I still didn't completely love Emily. She hurts Colin a lot, past and present, and some of it is unforgivable to me. Of course, I try and tell myself to put myself in her shoes... but some of it, she does all on her own. Some of her decisions are incredibly stupid, for someone so smart.

This book features a huge pet peeve of mine! You know when a heroine messes up and should be the one to apologize first and/or make a big grand gesture or something? Well, in this book, both of them mess up, and both of them send indirect grand gestures... but it's Colin to beg. I thought it should have been Emily. The man left the choice up to her, and then walked away. To me, that means that SHE should be making the choice... i.e., going to him. Not the other way around. Do you see why this is a pet peeve of mine? There is no logic to this! I'm glad Colin was the "bigger man" in this situation. But Lady Justice is this high-minded feminist - shouldn't she be the one to going after what she wants, like she does with the Domestic Felicity Act?

Last complaint - the ending is ambiguous, as to Colin and Emily's relationship. They're together... but to what degree. Honestly, I cannot believe that Emily would go through all of the growth and realizations about marriage and how much she loves Colin... and then not marry him? It's like the author wants to punish Colin (he has wanted to marry her for forever). Of course, the ending is ambiguous... so I suppose we'll see, in book three.

Would I Recommend It:

I'm split on this. On the one hand, I love how smart and feminist Ashe's historical romances are. The heroines are strong and bold, and the heroes are dashing and charming. On the other hand, this particular series by Ashe is definitely not for everyone. I like logic and rationale and fact - and sometimes, the ladies in

this series forgot about all of those things (which is sad because Constance and Emily are both very smart ladies). Heck, I'm going to need book three to tip the scales, for me. So, yes and no, I do and don't recommend this book. It's not your typical wonderful and sweet historical romance novel - yes, it has those aspects, but they take a far backseat compared to the significant feminist presence (for better or for worse).

Rating:

3.5 stars -> rounded up to 4 stars. Not a new Ashe favorite of mine, but still good, and worthy of 4 stars. I'm a tough critic but I also like to be fair and honest. I'm still a little shaky and wary when it comes to this series, but I am looking forward to read The Duke.

Becca says

The Earl is Katharine Ashe's long awaited conclusion to her Falcon Club series and the second book in her new Devil's Duke series. For those of you who struggled with The Rogue, fear not! This novel can be easily read as a stand alone, though I'd recommend her novella The Scoundrel & I to get introduced into the long "feud" of the main characters in this novel.

Our hero is the final unmarried member of the Falcon Club and also its founder and leader, Peregrine, or Colin Grey, the recently named Earl of Egremoor. At the beginning of this novel as a refresher (or for new readers) Ashe includes a list of all members of the club so you can recognize their names within the novel (this was a relief for me because I've read them all but still have a hard time remembering them all). The heroine is Lady Justice, or for those of you who have read her other novels, is Lady Emily Vale, the bookish woman who prefers to be called the names of powerful women of history.

Katharine Ashe has a beautiful way with words and I am always excited for her next release. I will admit that there are many times I don't connect with her heroines, but I usually enjoy her heroes so it balances out :) I am more of a fan of her Twist series and Prince Catchers series, but I will say I enjoyed this conclusion of the Falcon Club. It was written differently than some of Katharine's more recent novels and had a more mystical, immersive feel to it. This story was more about the journey for the characters and there was less intrigue and burdensome details. Simply, it is a novel that focuses entirely on survival and raw emotion.

The secret identities of the two leads, Peregrine and Lady Justice, have had a years long public feud in the presses. For those who've read other Falcon Club novels, you will recognize some of the exchanges that were published in the papers between the two. It is why I recommend The Scoundrel & I because you get to read all of the "highlights." In addition to a "feud" between their secret identities, they have also been at odds with each other for 18 years in their personal lives despite being very close childhood friends. When Emily makes a quest to Scotland to find her missing sister, Colin also goes to Scotland to find out more information that he was given by Emily in her disguise as Lady Justice. Emily finds out about Colin's identity as Peregrine early on in the novel, but Colin is in the dark about who she really is or why she has hated him for the past 18 years for most of the book. When they are mistaken for outlaws, they have to flee for their lives until they can prove who they really are. This takes up the bulk of the novel as each character is stripped down to their raw selves as they journey together to safety while still pursuing the missing women.

While this novel is very different in plot and feel from The Rogue, the one thing that was similar was the temperament of the characters. I liked Colin a lot. He had a compelling childhood disability that he still sometimes struggled with as an adult. He was flawed in some of his assumptions due to things he was taught

by his father, but was still an honorable, patient, quiet man with deliciously sexy looks (did you see that cover? Ha.) The heroine though, was very hard to like. For those of you who have watched Downton Abbey, do you remember when Violet asks Mrs. Crawley if "she ever got cold up on the moral high ground?" That is exactly how I felt about Lady Emily. She had courage and spine which were noble, but she was so blinded by prejudice against Colin, stubbornness, and her own version of "ideals" that she was hard to relate to. She acts like a woman with a chip on her shoulder and when I found out why she hated Colin and he apologized, all I thought was "that's it?" I felt like she should've been the one groveling and apologizing. She led a sheltered, cushy life, locking herself away from the world and judging it in her pamphlets and had absolutely no right to turn her nose up at other people, particularly Colin. At least in The Rogue, Constance had a history that explained her damaged personality. In The Earl, I felt that Emily had no reason for all her anger and bitterness and she irritated me. I loved so much about this novel, but Lady Emily's harsh personality and lack of ability to humble herself kept this from being a 5 star book for me.

In a nutshell, Ashe crafts a beautiful novel full of well depicted scenes from Scotland, a feeling of danger and urgency, and a mystery that was fully resolved at the end. The hero was compelling and sexy, the sexual tension was well done, and the secondary characters were well drawn and added depth to the story. The one weakness in the novel was its heroine. I have not really cared for any of the heroines in Ashe's Falcon Club series, but have enjoyed them in the Twist series and the Prince Catchers series so I am excited to see what characterization she uses for heroines next. Lady Emily's sister and the mysterious Duke of Irvine are the leads in the final book in the series and they could make for an interesting pair. I just hope the heroine has more compassion and is a little softer than Constance or Emily so that I can really give the third book a 5 star rating :)

I received a complimentary copy to read and review. All opinions are my own. I appreciate the opportunity.

Esther says

DNF!!! 65%

I normally love Katherine Ashe's historicals. I normally like her strong and likeable heroines. But not this one.

Our heroine, Emily, is a very unhappy and angry woman. She has held a grudge against the hero for eighteen years for leaving her when she was eight or nine. Our hero Colin was thirteen. She never tried to find out why or get answers. I'm not sure if the author was trying to portray the heroine as a strong feminist here (even for that time period I feel it was overboard) but in reality to me she comes across very angry and cold. I like the hero but the heroine ruined it for me and I just couldn't read anymore or take her character.

Maybe others will like her or find her okay but she just wasn't for me.

I will continue to read the authors future books, hoping this is a flook.

Ursula says

This is probably my favourite HR ever. I have taken some time to get to the review writing of this book

because, although this was my second read, I find it the kind of book that bears pondering and mulling over. This is particularly the case because we have gradually become familiar with the MCs, Emily and Colin, through the preceding books in this series. They have never had very large roles, but they are a presence, and the correspondence that takes place in these books gives us a fascinating insight into their characters. The correspondence is also just brilliant. Who doesn't like fabulous letters in HR?

If you have not read the previous books in the Falcon Club series, don't read on, as there will be a huge spoiler. But to review this book means to reveal the spoiler. I can't get around it.

What did I love so much about this book?

1. The writing.

Katherine Ashe writes consistently well, even beautifully. She has a lovely turn of phrase, avoids Americanisms (I believe she is Canadian originally, although she lives in the US) and her descriptions of both physical things like scenery (Scotland sounds so beautiful, and the author spent quite a bit of time there tracing the route her protagonists would take in this book) and the inner thoughts and feelings of her protagonists are evocative and masterful.

I have read all her books and the writing never lets me down. Ashe is also very clever at NOT saying something and getting the reader to work at what is being meant/felt/thought. She doesn't dumb anything down at all and that is not always the case in HR, where stating (and often re-stating *ad neauseum*) the bleeding obvious can become something of an art-form.

2. The characterisation.

The characters in her novels are complex. They have layers that are not easily revealed and their motivations are never clearly stated, rather, we have to draw our conclusions from the things they say and do. The MCs are often flawed and vulnerable. Indeed, I strongly disliked Colin for most of the series and even most of this book. He was a very difficult person to accept, and it was only as we found out what his childhood had been like that I finally understood him and was able to forgive so much. And as is always the case in KA's books, the hero does redeem himself beautifully in the end. Her heroines can be a bit more problematic for me, in that they tend to be somewhat damaged and very vulnerable. They often suffer and struggle, but they are always courageous women with whom we sympathise. Sometimes I have found them a bit too forgiving and soft. Emily is by far the toughest and she is awesome. I was cheering for Emily all the way!

3. Historical detail.

KA spends heaps of time researching her history. There is often an afterward at the end where she explains the political or social issues she explored in her story, giving them a firm historical context. So, her books have a certain gravitas and authenticity that make them relevant even for today. As a feminist, many of the issues she explores are fascinating for me and despite the genre being romance, I loved learning so much that was new to me about the 19th century. After all, living in Australia we have inherited the British legal system and the inequalities and anomalies of English law were to be found here, too. The deeply sexist nature of the marriage laws in England, the inherently undemocratic nature of a political system based on class and hereditary privilege, these were all explored by the wonderful Lady Justice in the Falcon Club series, and they reach their climax in this book.

4. The romance.

Her books are so full of passion, lust, love, despair and heartbreak. There is no easy path to the HEA. Her love scenes are so wonderfully described and add so much to the characters' depth of feeling. The men are alpha but when they fall in love, they will die for their love. The women are vulnerable, even tormented at times, but they are also strong and fearless. In the end, for me, if the romance doesn't thrill me, speed up my heart rate and give me butterflies, then it will never be a 5-star book. Because the genre is HR. I want to gasp and sigh and cry and laugh and smile. I did all that the first time, and I did it again reading the book for a second time.

This book has the most wonderful heroine in Emily, who, (we have finally found out), is Lady Justice. She is a passionate champion of the underdog, and her war of words with Lord Grey, a man who comes to symbolise for her all that is wrong with England, is both wittily articulate and enlightening. Colin, representing the last bastion of male, aristocratic privilege, is a worthy opponent and does not let Emily shy away from a few home-truths herself. What is fabulous about Colin is his courage: he looks hard at himself and his life so far and is not afraid to see where he went wrong. It is so hard for us to acknowledge that our beliefs may be based on false assumptions, and to actually change them. That capacity for honest self-examination is rare, so to see that in Colin is incredibly positive about humans in general. Despite the horrible times for the vast majority of the population in 19th century England, we can be optimistic for the future. (And I am writing in the wake of the wonderful- for me- result in the abortion vote in Ireland on the weekend.) Colin is also a classic example of what wrongs parents can do to their children, believing all along it is for their own good.

In the end, he was a revelation, and exactly the sort of man I would want standing by my side. (And in my bed. OK, I'm also a bit shallow!)

By the time this book came out, I had massive expectations.

It surpassed them.

It may not be the same for everybody, because we all have different expectations of HR, but I loved it, and will probably re-read it every year.

Couple of quotations:

Emily on the concept of "catching" a husband:

*How in the world did we come to this place where marriage is constructed so that finding the person with whom to spend a lifetime- **intimately connected**- becomes a game?*

Emily, after she reveals to Colin that she is not a virgin, because she arranged to have sex with a man to see what sexual pleasure was like, the thing women so eagerly gave their independence up for. Colin just leaves, and she realises that Colin, (like the typical male with the double standard), thinks she should be ashamed: *She remained standing in the middle of the room, her face hot and hands cold with anger and hurt and disappointment so acute, so painful, that for several minutes she could not move. But she had not needed this to prove that he and she were fundamentally different. In their world, his standards reigned. It was the reason she gathered knowledge as she did and wrote about what she learned. It was the reason she was who she was. And for all his vows that he would listen, she was a woman whose words he would never truly hear.*

July 2018

Just finished listening to the wonderful audiobook. HR really doesn't get much better than this.

And what I really noticed when listening: how it is not about putting a man **down** because he has chauvinistic ideas. It's about raising a man up, so that he sees all the possibilities that women **are**, and admitting to himself that he was wrong. It's about a woman realising that men are essentially good and that they deserve to be heard, too. The feminist message is tempered with compassion and understanding for both sexes. In other words, true equality.

My absolutely favourite hero and heroine.

Julie says

The Earl by Katharine Ashe is a 2016 Avon publication.

“But if I was fearless, could I be your reckless friend?
And if I was helpless, could be the one comes rushin’ in?

- Cyndi Lauper- ‘Fearless’

The showdown we have all been waiting for!

Lady Justice meets Peregrine after many salty, flirty, sharp, and witty written exchanges published for all to see.

The circumstances, though, are less than ideal.

As the Falcon Club comes to an end, the leader, Peregrine, aka Colin Gray buries his father, and become the reigning Earl of Egremoor. When his arch enemy, Lady Justice asked for help in finding her missing sister, Colin agrees. When he finally stands face to face with his arch enemy, he refuses to believe ‘Lady Justice’ is a woman, having thought it was a man he had been sparring with all this time.

Emily, the ‘bookish’ ‘Lady Vale, is worried about her sister, who has seemingly disappeared. When she heads out to Scotland to find her, she meets up with Colin Gray, a man she has hated for the past eighteen years. The two become victims of mistaken identity and find themselves on the run.

Thus, begins their journey, where Colin and Emily trade barbs, bicker, argue, and debate, while encountering danger and intrigue. They also discover the special pulse that beat between them as children is still throbbing steadily, but the deep pain Emily feels, which is masked by fierce and passionate resentment, and Colin’s arrogant cluelessness about what caused this deep fissure, prevents forgiveness and healing.

Will the imposters be found? What will happen when Colin discovers Lady Justice’s true identity? Can the enemies call a truce? Forgive each other? Become friends, lovers?

This story is the perfect ending for the Falcon Club. While Emily may seem difficult, stubborn, and maybe even a little shrewish, the WHOLE story comes out in the end and explains so much about her behavior, her passion, and how big her heart really is. I liked Emily, actually. She feels things deeply, sticks to her convictions, and despite the price she pays for that, she holds her head up and exhibits courage and strength.

Colin’s story is heartbreaking, and his equally stubborn countenance is the result of his upbringing by a man that is publicly praised and considered a ‘great man’, but behind closed doors is a cold, hard man who raised his son in this same vein, with Colin aspiring to also become a ‘great man’ just like his father.

“A great man is not measured by the strength of his privilege, but by the depth of his heart.”

This novel is full of the contradictions and juxtapositions men and women often face and struggle with. I think Emily represents that conflict women feel by exposing both sides of the coin.

Colin and Emily are full of palpable pain, both believe they are in the right, believing in their cause, and what they feel is right. Both need to give and take, both must face their own hypocrisy and flaws, admit to them, learn from them, and let go of long held resentments, forgive and allow love to permeate and heal.

“A man is only as noble as his honesty”

This a powerful love story, albeit unconventional, which is exactly what I loved the most about it. The emotions are raw and real, stripping the protagonists bare, exposing their most hidden places, and igniting a fiery passion while reigniting their long buried feelings of love for one another.

Katherine Ashe is a force, unafraid to address the vulnerabilities behind the strength we have within ourselves.

Overall, this is an awesome story, full of adventure, passion, and romance, but also full of depth, with interesting character studies added in, which will have you thinking about them long after you've finished reading.

Caz says

I've given this a B+ for narration and an A for content at AudioGals.

The Earl is the second book in Katharine Ashe's *Devil's Duke* series, and is also the last in her *Falcon Club* series which is not, sadly, available in audio format. Because it refers to a number of characters and events featured in earlier stories, this might not be the best introduction to Ms. Ashe's work for anyone unfamiliar with it, although it could be listened to as a standalone if you're prepared to do a bit of homework in advance and perhaps read a few reviews and the synopses of the earlier books.

Throughout the *Falcon Club* books, the club's secretary, Peregrine, carried on a public, witty and usually caustic correspondence with Lady Justice, a popular pamphleteer whose passionate outpourings on the subject of political reform and disdain for the injustices wreaked on the masses by the privileged few are a real thorn in the side of the establishment. But at the end of *The Rogue: A Devil's Duke Novel*, the unthinkable happened. Knowing of the Falcon Club's expertise at locating missing persons, Lady Justice asked Peregrine for help to locate a young woman who has disappeared.

You can read the rest of this review at AudioGals.

Madge says

Warning: Here be SPOILERS.

DNF @ 37%. Skimmed the rest for the first sex scene, which happens approx. 75% into the story, and the ending, which was as unrelentingly awful as the beginning.

With this culmination of 2+ series' worth of books, in my heart of hearts I hoped *The Earl* would be a sweet and sexy Falcon Club finale. I longed for banter akin to the best Lauren Bacall/Humphrey Bogart movie scenes between (finally!) Peregrine, aka Lord Colin Gray, and Lady Justice, aka Lady Emily Vane; for a

book overflowing with fiery passion; and for a romantic couple who were soulmates bound together by love and nobility of character. I wanted a big, goofy smile on my face as I finished the last page, happy that the Rogues of the Sea and Falcon Club heroes and heroines have all found their HEAs after retiring from their political adventuring.

Instead, faced with Ashe's bizarro plot construction so she could take a tax write-off for her Scottish vacation; a dreadful heroine not worthy of the term; and the feeling that I'd stumbled into the worst kind of non-stop, reductive #mensuck #misandryroolz Twitter feed because Ashe read a book about women's rights, I developed a tic over my right eye and the certainty that my time would be better spent elsewhere.

90% of the problem lies with Lady Justice/Emily Vane. She must be up for the Worst Romance Heroine of All Time award. Because she's THE WORST. She's a hypocritical, selfish, rude, egotistical, cruel, provincial, emotionally stunted, classist, sexist bigot. (Not to mention the most anachronistic of HR heroines.) She slings vituperative verbal and emotional abuse at everyone, including her "family" of servants, her slyly French lady's companion, her family, and Peregrine/Lord Gray. She's a lying liar who lies. She repeatedly, coyly asserts that she hasn't assumed the anonymous Lady Justice moniker for *gasp!* her own fame or fortune, while repeatedly, proudly commenting throughout the book about how she has achieved just that.

And Emily never gets a clue, never matures, never has a "groveling period" to atone for her hateful behavior. Instead she gets a pass that no male romantic lead ever would in 2016. If she were a contemporary HR hero, she would be vilified at the SBTB website for exhibiting "dude" behavior. If she were a modern businessman, the word sociopath would be bandied about to describe her. Instead, much to Ashe's discredit, she rewards Emily by making her a "celebrity" at book's end. If you want to get into gender politics, it benefits no one, especially women, to have such an awful female character as a romantic lead in 2016. For shame, Ms. Ashe and Avon Books, for being exactly what Emily the Vainest spews incorrectly about men throughout *The Earl*.

Colin, by comparison, is a standard, classic Prince Charming hero with a side of shyness/childhood trauma modeled in a Colin Firth's Mr. Darcy mold. (Naming must be purposeful, eh?) From the fact that Ashe makes Colin a Tory, and that he spouts not only a ridiculous, anachronistic "Are you a lesbian since you don't want to get married?" line but also out of the blue "believes" that Lady Justice is a man because ???, I feel we're not supposed to like him.

I, however, love an earl who acts, well, earl-like. He's committed to his title, his country, his seat in the House of Lords, his estates, and the hundreds of people for whom he is responsible. As a Tory, in the early 1800s, he is a man of his time and station. He rescues young children from sexually abusive situations while far from home in his free time. He fulfills his promises because he gives people his word. He's intelligent, well traveled, and sophisticated; I don't believe for a second that he thinks Lady Justice is a man because a woman wouldn't be smart enough to be so. He's chivalrous, and deserves a partner/wife a thousand times better than the person with whom Ashe pairs him. He, unlike Emily, grows as a character, though sadly this growth is mostly to further Emily's political ambitions, and thus provide the cherry on the top of her celebrity cupcake.

There is little to no romance or sex in this book. The one sex scene ends with her denigrating Colin's place in her life, their intimacy, and rejecting his affection and offer of marriage. In no way do I believe these people belong together.

Special mention must go to another good male character, Emily's father. He has one (?) small scene at the

end of the book, but also is mentioned repeatedly throughout. He is delightfully similar to Eloisa James's Leopold Dauty, the beloved, foppish Duke of Villiers. To bring in yet another great HR series, I liked both Colin and Daddy Vane immensely, and wished they could go hang out with Julia Quinn's Bridgertons in a kinder, gentler romance that would pair Colin with a woman who proved a worthy, respectful, loving consort.

After 8+ books, this is the last Katharine Ashe I will ever read.

Susan Gorman says

Katharine Ashe's descriptive writing style shines in *The Earl*, the second installment in the Devil's Duke Series. It is an elegantly written opposites attract love story which features suspense, fabulous dialogue, romance and history. I have been waiting for this story for several years and I was not disappointed! Lady Justice writes about social reform in her pamphlets. She and Peregrine are fierce political opponents who have appeared throughout Ms. Ashe's Falcon Club series. The Falcon Club's mission was to find missing people and return them. Lady Justice's sister has been missing for seven months and she reluctantly turns to her rival Peregrine for assistance.

Lady Justice receives a note from Scotland which states that her sister is alive. She dismisses Peregrine and decides to find her sister on her own. Peregrine and Lady Justice meet unexpectedly at an inn in Scotland where they are mistaken for a pair of felons who have murdered a local woman. Outnumbered, they leave the inn on horseback. The couple is pursued from village to village. Lady Justice has no choice but to follow Peregrine. The trip through the Scottish countryside parallels the couple's personal journey. To outsmart the people who are intent on capturing them, they must learn to trust and rely on each other. I was so immersed in the couple's travels, that I felt that I was walking through the rugged countryside, down the puddle filled country roads and up the unforgiving mountainside with them.

Katharine Ashe creates characters who have purpose. Lady Justice and Peregrine are imperfect but, are perfect for each other. Both are strong willed and determined and these traits enable them to survive their ordeal. Ms. Ashe is not afraid to portray characters that appear to be strong but, in fact, are emotionally vulnerable. Lady Justice's pamphlets show the importance and the value of the written word. The letters speak of social injustices, political reform and woman's rights important topics in 1822 and in 2016. At first, the pairing of this couple surprised me. As I became immersed in the novel, I wanted them to elude the men who were chasing them and fall in love. The conclusion to *The Earl* was splendidly crafted—and made me cry—one person's voice can make a difference!

Reviewer's note: As a longtime Falcon Club reader, I chose not reveal the identities of Lady Justice and Peregrine in my review.

Bj says

5 "Opposite Ends of the Political Spectrum Share A Common Love" Stars for the story and narration!

What an incredibly complex and well developed story! Seemingly diametrically opposed ends of the political spectrum turn out to have common roots and motivations. What can a revolutionary thinker like pamphleteer, Lady Justice (Lady Emily Vane), who champions the cause of the masses and poor as well as women rights possibly have in common with an Earl (Colin Gray, the new Earl of Egremoor) and former secretary ("Peregrine") of the Falcon Club--her public nemesis as thoroughly aired through their public letters in response to one another? Turns out a lot! What a marvelous journey--from the romance, espionage/adventure, and even political diatribes between the hero and heroine, everything in this historical romance worked for me. I loved the tension between wants and desires as well as the need to abide by one's own sense of moral compass while at the same time the inevitable challenge of evolution and changing circumstances. Moreover, Saskia Maarleveld's narration was simply divine making this a story best experienced in audiobook format.

As this is book 2 of the Devil's Dukes Series, I feel compelled to mention that while this book can work as a standalone, there is clearly a lot of history that feeds into the background of the relationship between the hero and heroine. Moreover, this background does not just take place in the prior book, *The Rogue*, but also Ms. Ashe's prior series *The Falcon Club*. All that said, this was my first read or listen by Ms. Ashe, and I felt that while I might have felt the animosity and yet sarcastic flirtation between the hero's and heroine's public battle of wits more strongly had I read the prior series, Ms. Ashe still nonetheless gives us enough of the backstory to appreciate its significance. Therefore this story still worked for me as a standalone.

Emily and Colin were the best of friends as children despite two potentially big barriers. First, Emily was 5 years younger than Colin. Second, Colin never spoke a word. Emily, however, functioned as Colin's mouthpiece throughout these early years until the one fateful day when Colin saves her from a threatening situation and uses his voice for the first time. Their lives following that eventful day were completely changed and on different courses for the next 18 years--other than their occasional and very public letters as Lady Justice and Peregrine (though of course they had no idea of the others identity at the time).

However, when Colin's father dies and he succeeds to the Earldom, one of the stipulations of the will is that Colin offer for Emily's hand in marriage (a union that both their fathers had wanted to orchestrate since before Emily and Colin were born and their fathers' became close friends in the war). Emily, however, not only is saddened by Colin's abandonment all those years ago once he regained his voice, but also as a political matter never wants to relinquish her freedom and self autonomy (given the oppressive laws of the day--something she tries to fight against as Lady Justice). So its no surprise that she turns Colin down. However, when circumstances bring them together on an adventure to try to locate her sister, their wills as to their moral ideals as well as their true desires and wants and needs will be tested. Can there possibly a HEA under the circumstances?

Saskia Maarleveld does a fantastic job with the narration. This was also my first experience with Ms. Maarleveld but I will now definitely be looking for her narrations in future books. Ms. Maarleveld excels at all of the characteristics I look for in a good romance narrator. First and foremost, she has great range and produced distinguishable voices for all of the characters. Moreover, her voice for Colin sounded genuinely masculine a feat which sometimes is difficult for female narrators to accomplish. Ms. Maarleveld also produced a number of genuine sounding accents.

Ms. Maarleveld also does an excellent job with her pacing which complements the emotion of the scene. From the fast paced, action filled scenes where to the romantic ones, I loved that she made me feel not just hear the scene being enacted.

All in all, I highly recommend The Earl to historical romance lovers. Moreover, if you enjoy audiobooks, the 5-star narration by Saskia Maarleveld makes this a must listen to title.

Source: Review copy provided in exchange for an honest review.

Caz says

I've given this a straight A at AAR.

Readers of Katharine Ashe's *Falcon Club* series will be well aware of the frequent, public, and bitingly sarcastic correspondence that has gone on between the club's secretary, Peregrine, and the anonymous Lady Justice, pamphleteer, moral crusader and regular denouncer of the abuses and injustices wreaked upon the voiceless masses by the wealthy and privileged. That correspondence continued throughout *The Rogue*, the first in the author's *Devil's Duke* series, which inhabits the *Falcon Club* universe and features a number of the same characters. This is also true of *The Earl*, which references storylines from the earlier series, as well as one of the plotlines begun in *The Rogue*. That probably all sounds fairly complicated, and I would definitely say that someone new to this author's work might not want to start here. At a pinch, *The Earl* could work as a standalone, but I think anyone picking it up without having read any of the earlier books would be at a disadvantage.

Right at the end of *The Rogue*, the unthinkable happened. Lady Justice, knowing of the Falcon Club's skill in finding the missing and returning them home, was forced to seek help from the one man she detests above all others: Peregrine. Naturally, Peregrine is intrigued by the request and definitely not above gloating at how much it must stick in Lady Justice's throat to have to ask him for help. He demands a face-to-face meeting with his nemesis; she refuses. He makes it clear that his help is conditional upon a meeting, and reluctantly the lady agrees, covering herself in a thick veil to prevent Peregrine discovering her identity.

Their meeting is as acrimonious as their written interactions have been, and only confirms Lady Justice's belief that Peregrine is an arrogant, manipulative, ruthless, self-entitled bastard. Unfortunately, it also shows her something she had not expected – Peregrine is none other than Colin Gray, newly minted Earl of Egremoor, and a man she has known all her life.

Lady Emily Vane is a bit of an odd duck. Bookish and often shy in company as a child, she became a veritable chatterbox in the company of her dearest friend, a boy who could not speak, but whom she nonetheless adored, Colin Gray. Emily's father and Colin's were old friends and so the two children spent a great deal of time together as their respective families were happy to leave the two 'oddities' to their own devices. But when Colin was thirteen and Emily eight, things changed suddenly and irrevocably, and since then, they have been little more than mere nodding acquaintances. In the eighteen years since, Emily has become somewhat reclusive; the income she has earned over the years means she is independent of her father, can live alone and has no need of – or desire for – a husband. Living alone enables her to retain her anonymity and to continue to argue for reform, rail against injustice and highlight the plight of the oppressed in the pamphlets she continues to write as Lady Justice. Her current crusade is to find a way of getting the Domestic Felicity Act – a bill which will give women actual rights within marriage – introduced into

Parliament.

Shocked as she is to discover Peregrine's true identity, Emily manages to escape that encounter without being unmasked herself. She needs Colin's help to find her sister, Amarantha, who had been living in Jamaica until the recent death of her husband. But Amarantha has disappeared, last heard of making for Scotland in search of a friend, and Emily is worried. Knowing she can't possibly accept Colin's help now – even if he agreed to give it – she sets off for Scotland with a couple of her servants, determined to find Amarantha herself. But Emily has not long arrived at an inn near Loch Lomond when she discovers that Colin has followed leads of his own and that his trail has led him to the same place. But before they can do more than exchange cold civilities, they find themselves in grave danger, owing to the fact that a man who bears a striking resemblance to Colin and is calling himself the Earl of Egremoor is wanted for murder and highway robbery. This man has a smaller, fair-haired accomplice who has been seen dressed as a woman – which accounts for the fact that Emily and Colin have encountered such suspicion among the locals. The animosity directed towards them very quickly reaches boiling point and the pair must act quickly if they are to escape with their lives. Colin and Emily go on the run, making for the Duke of Loch Irvine's castle at Kallin where they hope they will be able to get everything straightened out. But it's going to be a difficult journey through rough terrain and uncertain weather; and news of the fake earl's deeds have already spread widely throughout the area, so seeking shelter is risky as they can't trust anyone not to turn them in. And all the while, Emily is desperate to keep her secret from the boy who broke her heart and has become a man who stands for everything she hates.

Katharine Ashe has impressed me immensely with her ability to write a gripping adventure yarn that takes full account of historical and political detail while also developing a complex and satisfying romance between two complicated, flawed individuals. Emily can be difficult to like at times, as she is so intractable and willing to see the worst in Colin, although his high-handedness can be just as annoying as her insistence that he's arrogant and uncaring about those less fortunate than himself. Both characters have to face some harsh truths about themselves and their shared past, although it's Emily who really needs to have the blinkers removed. She has spent so long feeling hurt and betrayed by the one person in her life she thought knew and understood her that she has allowed her prejudices to cloud her judgement. But as they spend their days and nights running from danger, Emily gradually begins to realise that she is wrong and that Colin is a decent, honourable man who is strongly motivated to act for the good of others.

The pacing throughout is excellent, in terms of both the romance and the adventure. The romance needs time to develop given the fact that Colin and Emily have been estranged for years, and I loved the way it unfolds gradually as they both start to reassess each other. We glimpse them as children and discover exactly what had bound them so strongly together; we experience Emily's heartbreak, Colin's shame and frustration; we feel for them as they reconnect and come to know each other as they are now, and when, towards the end, Emily finally reveals exactly what inspired her to become Lady Justice... I was choked up. It's a masterstroke.

The chemistry between Peregrine and Lady Justice leapt off the page in the other books, and it burns even hotter between Colin and Emily in this one. Emily is refreshingly un-missish about the fact that she finds Colin extremely attractive and the love scenes are possibly the most romantic, sexy and intense that Katharine Ashe has yet written.

The Earl is an enormously satisfying read on many levels. An exciting adventure and a sizzling romance all wrapped up in astute observation and social comment, this is historical romance at its best and it's gone straight on to my keeper shelf.

WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says

I'm emerging from a sick cocoon that lasted 5 days, I wanted to write a solid review for this book because I had thoughts and feelings reading it but I barely had the energy to leave the bed to lay on the couch.

I see a lot of people had a problem with the heroine but I thought she was the better flushed out character of the two (hero). Yes, her grudge against the hero for "abandoning" her was forced and not quite up to snuff but I thought her brusque hard exterior and attitude towards the hero wasn't anything we haven't seen many anti-heroes or broody heroes pull on heroines in other stories before.

I think my main problem with this was the utter lack of chemistry between the two that came from the characters themselves not feeling fully sketched out or deep. For two characters I have been reading sassy corresponding over several books, I was shocked at how they felt like two stiff boards interacting.

This felt like the author was trying to recreate the magic of How a Lady Weds A Rogue, an adventurous road romance but yeah, the whole two stiff boards thing. I'm going to keep trying with this series because Ashe has given some of my favorite books/characters/romance but these last few have been a bit disappointing.
