



## **It Started With a Scandal**

*Julie Anne Long*

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Lord Philippe Lavay once took to the high seas armed with charm as lethal as his sword and a stone-cold conviction: he'll restore his family's fortune and honor, no matter the cost. Victory is at last within reach--when a brutal attack snatches it from his grasp and lands him in Pennyroyal Green.

An afternoon of bliss brings a cascade of consequences for Elise Fountain. Shunned by her family and ousted from a job she loves, survival means a plummet down the social ladder to a position no woman has yet been able to keep: housekeeper to a frighteningly formidable prince.

The bold and gentle Elise sees past his battered body into Philippe's barricaded heart...and her innate sensuality ignites his blood. Now a man who thought he could never love and a woman who thought she would never again trust must fight an incendiary passion that could be the ruin of them both.

## It Started With a Scandal Details

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Author : Julie Anne Long

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## From Reader Review It Started With a Scandal for online ebook

### Lori says

I didn't think any character really rang "true". Lavay seemed completely different from who he was in Violet's book. Elise seemed to have soooo many talents that it made my eyes cross. (Baking, cooking, singing, song writing, sewing well-fitted but worn garments, teaching, languages, handwriting, handling discontented, passive-aggressive or even aggressive servants, doctoring, medicine-brewing, massage therapy, witty repartee...) There were too many "as if..." phrases also - it felt like the author was spoon-feeding the reader the impressions she was trying to convey. Perhaps it's just that this book hit upon too many of my personal pet-peves: Lord and servant relationships, overly cute children, songs & poems in novels, phrases used over and over (apple tarts or jam tarts came into play 60+ times) -ugh! Sorry, I really have loved this author in the past.

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### Shabby Girl ~ aka Lady Victoria says

Lovely, beautiful, everything I look for in a book. Julie Anne Long really is a wonderful writer.

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### Sarah says

7/10 - 2.5 but I'm feeling generous and rounding up because it's partly my fault for gambling on a book that I knew was near to the end of the series. This was a pretty decent romance that I'm sure I would have enjoyed about a star more if I had read the previous books in the series. Lord Philippe Lavay and Elise Fountain have both been secondary characters in previous books in the series and I'm sure if I had read any of those I would have had a better understanding of them and this book. There were lots of discussions of the main two families featured in the series - the Everseas and the Redmonds - and previous characters showed up to chat a couple of times. Often the less picky reader can read a random book from an established series like this one and it's just fine, sometimes it even works for me. This was **not** one of those times.

**\*Note to self** Don't read books from the middle of series unless you have already read the previous books, it's just not worth the time and effort no matter how good the book is.

A couple of other reviewers mentioned that this book was like coming home to see old friends and that probably would have worked for me, but I didn't know the characters so they were unknown people. I didn't feel much either way for Philippe or Elise. Their chemistry was pretty low-burn. Not *slow*-burn where it eventually becomes a roaring blaze, but *low*-burn where you stand there looking at the fire wondering whether it's going to go out the minute you turn away. To me it felt like Philippe and Elise 'liked' each other, were good friends and respected each other, but that was it. It was like the 'friends to lovers' trope without the passion. Okay, if I don't stop writing, I'm going to talk myself into lowering the rating to a two and I don't think that's really fair, so that's the extent of my feelings on this book. Will definitely read the first book in the series to see if that helps the situation.

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## **Iliada says**

Another winner in the Pennyroyal Green series!

This book started out slow for me in comparison to other JAL books, but the more I read the more engrossed I became in the story and the characters. It's no surprise that I ended up loving this one. What else should I expect from Julie Anne Long? It's no secret, after all, that I love her writing.

At first I was a bit put off by Lavay. I had met him in book #4 and I couldn't recognise him here. Little by little, I could understand what brought about this change, justify his behaviour and see the man he was before in the man he is now.

Elise is a very strong heroine. She's bossy and resourceful when she needs to be, but kind and delightful the rest of the time. Philippe is really, really sexy, intimidating but so virile I ended up liking his new self even more than the one I met in book 4. His French charm and easy-going personality was evident by the end of the book, despite his brooding and moody character when we first meet him in this book.

Four stars because, for some reason, as much as I loved this book, it didn't have the same effect on me most JAL books have. In addition, there were so few descriptions of the characters' background story I finished the book without having understood the details about what happened to them before they met. I just have a vague idea about their past lives.

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## **Alyssa says**

\*\*\*Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog\*\*\*

**It Started With A Scandal** by Julie Anne Long

Book Ten of the Pennyroyal Green series

Publisher: Avon

Publication Date: March 31, 2015

Rating: 4 stars

Source: eARC from Edelweiss

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

Summary (from Goodreads):

Lord Philippe Lavay once took to the high seas armed with charm as lethal as his sword and a stone-cold conviction: he'll restore his family's fortune and honor, no matter the cost. Victory is at last within reach--when a brutal attack snatches it from his grasp and lands him in Pennyroyal Green.

An afternoon of bliss brings a cascade of consequences for Elise Fountain. Shunned by her family and ousted from a job she loves, survival means a plummet down the social ladder to a position no woman has yet been able to keep: housekeeper to a frighteningly formidable prince.

The bold and gentle Elise sees past his battered body into Philippe's barricaded heart...and her innate

sensuality ignites his blood. Now a man who thought he could never love and a woman who thought she would never again trust must fight an incendiary passion that could be the ruin of them both.

What I Liked:

This is my first Julie Anne Long read, thanks to the book-pushing of Racquel (thank you, girl!). She and I both love historical romance novels, and recently, we swapped our favorite authors. I consider myself a bit more of a "newer" historical romance reader compared to Racquel, and when she got really excited about all things Julie Anne Long, I knew the author had to be some sort of awesome. So I requested this particular book from Edelweiss - I haven't read the other nine books in the series. But let me tell you: It Started With A Scandal is nothing short of wonderful, heartwarming, steamy, and entertaining.

Elise is a former teacher at an Academy. She was removed from her position for speaking out of turn. Years ago, her own family shunned her, because she got pregnant (unmarried), and the man left her. So Elise is now forced out of a job because she misspoke. She has a fake reference from the prestigious Redmond family (who owned someone a favor, and that someone used the favor for Elise). Elise secures a position as Lord Lavay's much-needed housekeeper.

Lord Philippe Lavay was attacked and is injured. He does not seem to care much about the state of his house, because it's in terrible shape. The few servants are lazy and rarely clean anything. Lord Lavay is tormented by his lack of funds, his injuries, and his dwindling French family honor and name. Elise is determined to turn his house into a home, and in doing so, she finds her way into everyone's heart... including Lord Lavay's.

Gah! I love the love stories that involve a hate-to-love dynamic. Lord Lavay is rather grouchy and unapproachable in the beginning of this book - for most of the book, actually. Personally, I find that quite endearing... and Elise found it intriguing. She didn't hate or dislike him at first - in fact, she's always been curious about him, and wanted to help him.

I love how kind and sweet Elise is - and yet, she is quite fiery and outspoken. She has to filter what she is thinking and says, and sometimes things slip through that filter. She lost her teaching position because she said something that could be taken rudely. But really, she's just very honest and direct. And nice. She has a big heart and a kind spirit.

And then there's Lord Lavay (Philippe), who is quiet and grouchy, irritable and menacing. He really isn't all that bad, but he certainly lets everyone think that he is. He doesn't let anyone in, doesn't communicate with his grandfather or sister anymore, since the attack. It's like he lost a bit of his pride, and not just money or honor.

Philippe and Elise together... fireworks. They dance around each other, clash at times, and keep the dance going. Elise never tries to stop helping Philippe, even if he is a grouch about things, like taking tea with pain relievers in them. I love their interactions. I love their dialogue. It's not love at first sight, and not quite lust at first sight either (Philippe had just thrown something). I love the development of their relationship - it's slow and gradual and beautiful. And the chemistry - the chemistry is sizzling hot in this book. You can feel the tension between Philippe and Elise.

There is so much to this book besides romance! Elise has a son, a "bastard", and the author focuses on Jack's growth sometimes as well. When Philippe finally meets Jack (this isn't until about halfway into the book), the author then has Philippe and Jack spending time together. This could be because the author wants to

show that Philippe likes Elise, or because Philippe really likes Jack (or kids in general), or because the author wants to show Jack's growth. Either way, I actually really liked the sub-focus on the little boy. I liked Jack.

In general, overall, I really, really liked this book. It was near-perfect. I loved the story, the romance, the characters.

#### What I Did Not Like:

I soooo saw a certain decision made by Elise at the end of the book. Totally saw it coming - it HAD to happen. However, I felt like the ending in general was a bit quick, and then the final scene was not enough. I wanted a peek into the future, or something like that! I mean, we get a view into the future, but I think I just wanted a little more Philippe/Elise in the end, one-on-one, maybe. But anyway, small thing. I LOVED the ending, in general.

#### Would I Recommend It:

YES! I loved this book! I'll probably be shelving this one in my "Favorite Historical Romances of All Time" category. It's getting four stars (4.5, really), but it's definitely a favorite. If you're a historical romance fan, definitely give this book a chance!

#### Rating:

4.5 stars -> rounded down to 4 stars. I definitely want to go back and read the other nine books in the series (or as many as I can)! And I'll be keeping an eye out for future Pennyroyal Green books, and anything else by this author. Thank you for the recommendation, Racquel!

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### **Sher♥ The Fabulous BookLover says**

#### **\*\*4.25 Stars\*\***

**Well this one was definitely a goodie!** I love reading historicals because there's something about that time that is so magical and the men are just swoonworthy. Julie Anne Long is one of my fave HR authors. I can count on her for unique storytelling and lovable characters. But I still had my fingers crossed on this one, simply because the Pennyroyal Green Series is a long series and after about the 8th book one would think it would've ran its course. Once again I was wrong! This story was emotional, sensual, charming, and just beautiful!

I loved all of the characters, especially Lavay and Elise. Elise is a young mother who left home after getting pregnant out of wedlock. She eventually is hired as Lord Lavay's housekeeper and sparks start to fly between these two. I do love the forbidden "boss and servant" storyline and this one worked for me. One of my favorite things was the back and forth bantering between Elise and Lavay. It was wickedly sexy.

Even though this is the 10th book in the series, it can definitely be read as a standalone. Loved the ending as it sets up the next book The Legend of Lyon Redmond. We have been waiting *years* for this book so I am super duper excited!

\*\*\*\*\*Previously Posted\*\*\*\*\*

Love this author and this series!

Hoping this one's a goodie!

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## **[Aengell] says**

### **4 Stars**

This is yet another splendid taste I got from Julie Anne Long, there's not denying that she's a skillful author.

Although the story is summed up easily, there's nothing simple about this read. We have a French Prince, Philippe Lavay, fatefully stranded in Pennyroyal Green. Grumpy, aloof and nothing but haughty, he needs a housekeeper, since all the ones he's hired recently seem to flee out of his devil clutches. Sounds pretty exciting? The next housekeeper he hires brings even more excitement into the situation. Elise Fountain desperately needs a job to provide for her little boy, so even a rumored beast of a Lord isn't able to scare her.

Seeing Philippe and Elise together is what makes this book so, *so* enjoyable, and it wasn't only a delight to read their banter, how they learned to hide kind of secret messages in between a, at first, strictly professional relationship. The dialogue was enticing, witty, and made me giddy enough to root for both, and to hope for a fast way of seeing them with their feelings laid bare.

Philippe's character is dark and moody, but in the course of the novel the Frenchman appears, who can be as charming and humorous as he should be.

But although he falls into the category of heroes I really love, Elise stole the show.

She is a strong heroine who doesn't have to be stubborn about every little thing to show her independence or skills or anything else heroines are often decorated with in Historicals. She knew just how to handle certain situations, whether concerning the staff at Lavay's manor or the Lavay himself. She also had an easy, natural sense of humor and a quiet, subdued temper, so her strength and直率 as a housekeeper didn't go into the category of being boring.

Anyone who has read a Julie Anne Long book knows what pace to expect. The development of the relationship between Elise and Lavay is very slow, at the beginning even a bit too slow, and the whole plot builds around that slow pace.

I love a slow-building romance, which is the main reason the last 20-30% of the novel flat for me. Until that point it is beautiful to watch their love grow, and although their desire for each other plays a role from the beginning, it got a little out of hand in the end. I found myself being a little confused and not really able to separate their desire for each other from their deep-going love. Here it should have been written in a more harmonic way and maybe more stressed on the emotional connection. I don't think that many readers, especially fans of JAL, will agree with me here, but through my confusion I felt that I couldn't enjoy the end 100%, although it was a beautiful ending.

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All in all, this was an angsty, emotional read and I will keep my eyes open for Lyon and Olivia's story.

## **Beanbag Love says**

Beautiful. Classic. Exactly what I needed.

I've only partially recovered from my swoon, but I'm going to go ahead and do this.

I absolutely loved this book. It had me breathless with its romanticism. I loved the two lead characters. Their chemistry was off-the-charts and their wit and style was a joy to read.

I have some auto-buys. This year, the first two releases by my auto-buys were disappointments. The second one distressingly so. I was beginning to worry that it was going to be one of those years when I just didn't mesh with my go-to favorite authors.

Then along comes Julie Anne Long to save the year.

Here's a little of why I love Philippe:

"Do you think," Philippe said slowly, "that marrying the wrong person can make you feel lonelier?"

"I have sailed the oceans and fought wars and won and lost fortunes. I still know only two things for certain: Life is short. Love matters most."

"I think your laugh is my favorite sound in the world."

"I am here because there is life, and there is death, but they are one and the same without you, Elise."

Here's a little of why I love Elise:

"Dear God, if this is your idea of punishment for my sins, I must congratulate you on your originality."

After finding a dead mouse hung by its tail in a doorway: "For the love of God. The least they could have done was fashion a little noose for it. I would have found it infinitely more sinister."

"But she hadn't been able to resist touching him any more than she'd been able to resist drawing her next breath, and a large part of the reason was that she knew he simply wanted to touch her, too. How could she deny him? What harm could there be in just this moment? Those were the words every addict utters when he reaches for the next hookah full of opium, she imagined."

Julie Anne Long writes unabashedly romantic stories. Her characters come to life with multi-layered personalities and relatable problems. Their reactions to each other and ensuing events are almost always

organic and believable.

In this story we have an unwed mother finding a job as a housekeeper after having been forced out of her position at a girls' school and about seven years after being turned out of her home by her parents. Her employer (and our male love interest) is Philippe Lavay, a prince of the House of Bourbon and a survivor of the purges of the French Revolution. He was introduced in the earlier book, "I Kissed an Earl", as best friend and shipmate of the hero of that book.

The two characters have their losses and challenges. They have their places in the hierarchy and strong barriers exist. Each would love to have their "home" back. Of course, they manage to help each other with that, too.

As I said up top, I needed this. :D

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### **Susana says**

2.5 Stars

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### **Caz says**

**I've given this an A- at AAR, so am rounding my rating of 4.5 stars up to 5.**

This, the tenth in the author's *Pennyroyal Green* series, is a bit of an offshoot from it, as neither of the principal characters is a Redmond or an Eversea – and also perhaps a little bit of an exercise in delayed gratification, as fans of the series continue to await the final book, due out later this year.

That said, though, **It Started With a Scandal** is much more than an inconsequential filler slotted in to pass the time before the main event of Lyon and Olivia's book; it's a thoroughly enjoyable story with a Jane Eyre-ish vibe, featuring two people who don't quite belong finding that together, they're a perfect fit.

Lord Philippe Lavay is a member of the once powerful Bourbon family, and so is, in effect, French royalty. By the time this story takes place, he has lost most of his family and property to the Revolution, and is now fiercely determined to regain his family home and prestige while at the same time supporting the variously dispersed members of his family.

He is on the point of being able to re-purchase his home from whoever bought it after it had fallen into revolutionary hands, having spent years at sea and supplementing his income with covert work undertaken for the British government. Following one such mission, Lavay was attacked and badly wounded, and has removed to Pennyroyal Green in order to recuperate - and he is now faced with a difficult choice. One final mission will pay him sufficiently well as to enable him to reclaim his home and return to France, although given his physical condition, it's not really much of an option. The alternative is for him to marry the money he needs in the form of the beautiful, self-assured Lady Alexandra Prideux, who would make him the perfect wife.

With his focus so firmly on difficult choices and on trying to deal with the amount of pain he is in, Lavay's

household goes its own way; the house is unkempt and his servants lazy. Upon the recommendation of Violet Redmond - now the Countess of Ardmay – Lavay interviews Mrs Elise Fountain for the post of Housekeeper, and engages her for a two-week trial.

Elise has recently been dismissed from her post as a teacher at Miss Endicott's School following some malicious gossip, perpetrated by one of the pupils there, that her six-year-old son – Jack – is illegitimate. Elise cannot approach her family for help because they disowned her when she told them she was pregnant, so she must work to support herself and Jack. Immensely relieved at having – even temporarily – secured a position, Elise metaphorically rolls up her sleeves and gets to work, very quickly making it clear to the servants that their easy life is at an end, but winning them to her side with a mixture of good-humour and fairness that promises the sort of stability which is essential for the smooth running of the household.

I said at the beginning that the story has a “Jane Eyre-ish” vibe to it, and that comes from the relationship that springs up between the wounded nobleman and his servant – although of course, Elise is a housekeeper rather than a governess. Lavay is grumpy and rather forbidding at the outset, but there’s a wickedly dry sense of humour lurking underneath, which reminded me very much of Rochester as he plays verbal games with Jane. And like Jane, Elise gives as good as she gets, even as she admits that Lord Lavay is just a little bit scary – although not because of his ill temper or tight control. What frightens Elise is the way she responds to him; her past experience left her pregnant and abandoned, so she is naturally wary of forming an attachment which, given their relative stations in life, can only lead to more heartache. But even as her head gives her reasons to keep away, her heart can’t deny the strength of the attraction building between them, and of the way she wishes, just once, to have someone to lean on and to see her as beautiful and charming.

*It Started With a Scandal* is an absolute delight from start to finish, and is definitely going on to my keeper shelf. The central characters are wonderfully characterised and perfect for each other, even though they come from very different spheres of life. Level-headed and determined, both have a strong sense of responsibility to others – Elise puts her son’s welfare above her own happiness, and Philippe is prepared to sacrifice his so that he can take care of those who depend upon him. Their loyalty and honour is balanced beautifully by their innate kindness and by the playful side of themselves they rarely allow others to see. They also have in common the fact that they are both adrift, neither of them quite fitting in with any particular echelon of society. Elise is well-born, but has had to take employment in order to support herself and her son, and Lavay feels out of place among his peers, people he comes to realise are as unbending now as they ever were.

The romance is a delicious slow-burn, full of sexual tension and wonderfully witty banter which, I readily admit, is my drug of choice when it comes to romance reading. But the book is so more than that – even as Lavay and Elise trade quips, they are becoming attuned to each other so that they learn almost as much about each other from what they don’t say as what they do. Their conversations are as laced with poignancy as with wit, which is one of the things that elevates this story from being a mere “feelgood” romance with lots of great, sexually-charged banter to being something far deeper. One particular moment pin-pointed this for me – a conversation about home which shows the importance of such a thing to both characters. Eloise lost hers when her parents disowned her and Philippe lost his in a much more violent way, but eventually they both come to see that home really IS where the heart is.

***It Started With a Scandal*** is a beautifully written, character-driven romance, full of warmth, charm and depth – and I loved every minute of it.

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### **-y.a says**

I like it, but don't love it. You can definitely read this as a stand-alone book, but there are supporting characters that tie into the previous installments and I find myself lacking some information about MC's background. I also feel the emotional conflict between a prince and a servant a bit unconvincing. On the positive note, the drama never go OTT and that is a good thing.

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### **Angie says**

And we have the second Pennyroyal Green novel I've loved in as many months. This one was just light and lovely from start to finish. And yet the main characters had a weight to them that worked for me. Lavay and Elise's story is small and on the quiet side, enclosed as it is within the walls of the home he cannot break out of and that she is determined to infuse with light. I continue to appreciate the ways in which Ms. Long pauses to allow light to fall on the quiet, yet vital observations her characters make as her story rolls along.

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### **Bubu says**

This is not a typical re-read, per se. I read **It Started With A Scandal** very shortly after a 10-year hiatus from romance novels and before I joined GR. But there were so many new books and authors to catch up on, so when I did join GR, I simply gave it 5 stars.

Going through my 5-star rated pile, I noticed that a few of them I couldn't really remember as well as I should, and whether they would truly hold up on re-read. It helps when you're desperate for a good HR, so **It Started With A Scandal** it was. I remembered liking it a lot. I remembered Philippe but had forgotten the name of the heroine, Elise. See? Not really a re-read. Not one I would put on the same level as other books I've re-read recently.

Well, now that I have re-read it, the first thing that comes to my mind is 'Why, oh why, aren't there more HR's like this one?' I've never been a *Pennyroyal Green* fan, having started right in the middle of it with **What I Did For A Duke** and having loved it. But the rest were rather 'hm' to 'meh', with the much anticipated **The Legend of Lyon Redmond** leaving me utterly cold and uninterested. But then, I didn't have years of a build-up, so that's that.

Funnily, I remember **What I Did For A Duke** better than I did **It Started With A Scandal**, and yet, I gave the first 4 stars and this one 5.

Now I know why. It is a beautifully written, character driven story of two people who never imagined to be in the position they're in when the book starts. It has the 'master and servant' trope that usually doesn't faze me, unless there's no significant change in the balance of power in the course of the story. And unless it isn't one of those books where social rules are ignored and the heroine acts like a woman of the 21st century. Besides, in HR's this trope always has a Cinderella-like tone which I totally enjoy.

No, Elise and Philippe are constantly aware of the differences of their social statuses. There are no ham-fisted attempts to teach us what 21st century feminism means (I. Must. Not. Name. Names. Actually, only one name comes to my mind, at the moment, and it's not Tessa Dare). I may as well argue that early 19th

century feminism meant having a child out of wedlock and doing anything that can be done to give that child the care, protection and love every child deserves. It might also have meant to remain strong in the face of rigid social rules, malicious rumours and the stigma of 'The Fallen Woman' and carry on with life anyway; finding happiness in the little things. That's Elise in a nutshell. Almost. Elise calls herself also a gambler.

She gambled once and lost, being left behind pregnant and abandoned by her family. But there's this mischievous streak in her that Philippe learns first to appreciate, respect and later to love. And now she's in danger of gambling her heart away a second time. Slowly, naturally, deliciously. Because Lord Philippe Lavay shows qualities that aren't apparent at the beginning of the story. Driven by the wish to restore his family's status before the French Revolution, he seems to be in a perpetual state of irritation. Duty, memories and demands controlling his days, whilst he's recuperating from an attempt on his life.

I wouldn't consider Philippe and Elise's developing relationship a cat-and-mouse game, nor is it really camaraderie, but a slow understanding of what makes the other person tick. Maybe it is camaraderie in a way, I'm not sure. But what I am sure of is that the effortless writing of JAL shines through when these two are together. That the book focuses mainly on them helps, of course, but she doesn't do the usual waxing poetic over ample bosoms or strong thighs – you get my meaning. It's a slowburn romance that kept me glued; the prose upping the ante of expectations. And, oh yeah, I wasn't disappointed. When Elise pulls her hairpin out and puts it on the sofa between them, a slow, knowing and deeply satisfied smile spread all over my face. Our little gambler decided to up the stakes, and Philippe is not one to miss out on a challenge.

The conundrum of different social statuses is solved satisfactorily, with Philippe coming to understand that he was holding on to a life that is irrevocably destroyed. And even though he may be able to restore some of it, it won't have any meaning if Elise cannot be part of it.

By the way, I'm usually indifferent when kids play a role in romance novels. It's okay, I don't mind, as long as they don't sound like little grown-up's. But for once, Jack, Elise's son, is the one who really stole my heart.

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### **WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says**

3.5 stars

#### **\*\*\*\*Full Review\*\*\*\***

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

Lord Philippe Lavay is a prince of the house of Bourbon, agent for the English crown, and currently recovering from injuries in Pennyroyal Green. Elise Fountain is a former teacher of Miss Marietta Endicott's Academy (School for Recalcitrant Girls), mother, and currently working as Lord Philippe Lavay's housekeeper. Neither foresaw ending up in such circumstances and due to class differences neither should even know of each other but with the help of some willow bark tea both are about to become aware, very aware of one another.

Elise had a child out of wedlock and with the time period she is living in, she is experiencing all the prejudices that follow this situation. Her family has disowned her and the school she was teaching at had to

let her go so as not to blacken their reputation. When Elise arrives on Lavay's doorstep she is at the end of her rope for options. She reminisces at times about how carefree and foolish she was in her youth but after she becomes a mother Elise really rises to the occasion. Women will especially feel for Elise as she and she alone pays for her indiscretion and the unfairness of the shame society places on her. It is not the main focus of the story but Elise's interactions with her son are sweet and darling, her love for him shines through brilliantly. Even though she has to temper it due to her circumstances, Elise has quite the mischievous streak. Philippe Lavay not only notices this streak but also seems to encourage it. When the two first meet there is an instant awareness between them but it is when Elise recognizes Philippe is in pain from injuries not fully healed and makes him willow bark tea to ease it that they start to really pay attention to each other. The air fairly crackles with tension when they are in a room together.

The majority of the story centers on Philippe and Elise's interactions in the house with outside influences not making an appearance until the end of the story. I found it perfect that Philippe was of the house of Bourbon because reading this story was like sipping slowly on a glass of bourbon; Elise and Philippe's relationship is a slow burn but sweeter for the anticipation. The complication of Elise being a housekeeper and Philippe needing to marry for money are nothing new but with Julie Anne Long's writing, the story suddenly becomes captivating. Most of the story has a languid pace but as it has to do with the tension between our main couple it was enjoyable, the last twenty percent or so speeds up as the real world intrudes and decisions must be made. Secondary characters stay fairly well to the sidelines with Elise having to shape up some servants and Philippe's friends the Earl and Countess of Ardmay (I Kissed An Earl) popping up occasionally.

Now, on to what you all really want to know, yes, Olivia and Lyon do make an appearance in this book. Philippe was the individual that Lyon saved in London when he saw him being attacked and because of this when Philippe encounters Olivia he pays special attention to her and how she acts with her fiance. In reference to the Pennyroyal series, It Started With a Scandal would actually work as a standalone, except for the last page. Oh readers, the ending scene in this book, it is what we all have been waiting for. The book, story, and characters have merit on their own but if you bought and read this solely to read the ending Lyon scene, I would not judge. Am I reading the next in the series? Try and stop me.

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### **Jennifer says**

I am an ardent defender of the romance genre in all its absurdist glory, but sometimes I read something and think, "yup, this is super cheesy and embarrassing."

So sadly, this was a bummer. I adore this author. But JAL's trademark witty banter and slow burn romance just wasn't there - or it was but I was too creeped out by the highly implausible and unconvincing servant/employer dynamic. Plus both of them were super annoying.

And it seemed like a hamster wheel with the endless days in the same house and for the love of all things sacred and holy STOP WITH THE APPLE TARTS! No one likes to eat apple tarts every single day twice a day! (Weird rant, I know, but you don't understand. There were THIRTY TWO references to apple tarts. I just checked.)

Also, the ending was absurd even by Romancelandia standards, and I am not even talking about the boring romance. (view spoiler)

I am also SO DONE with Olivia and Lyon - good LORD (and the fact that she is engaged to someone else

who actually loves her really pisses me off. I hate that trope more than I hate employers creeping on their servants.)

Think I need to reread *A Notorious Countess Confesses* to cheer myself back up.

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