



To Kiss a Thief

Susanna Craig

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Can a marriage made for money blossom into something more?

Sarah Sutliffe, Lady Fairfax, dreams of love—until she overhears her new husband proclaim his heart will never be hers. Devastated, she offers no defense when a sapphire necklace disappears during a ball and she is accused of its theft. Instead, she runs away from the scandal...and the heartbreak.

St. John, Viscount Fairfax, has sworn never to love again. How could a mousy merchant's daughter tempt him to break that vow? Three years after Sarah vanished, St. John uncovers her hiding place. Now, he's out to prove she's a thief before she steals his heart.

To Kiss a Thief Details

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From Reader Review To Kiss a Thief for online ebook

Mandi Schreiner says

The beginning of this one held promise – so much intense, growly, promise – but it ended up falling quite flat for me.

Sarah Sutliffe, Lady Fairfax is newly married (oh how I do love a marriage in trouble trope) to St. John, Viscount Fairfax and when she overhears her husband and another woman profess love for one another, she has a freak-out session. She ends up drinking too much wine and another man at the party, helps her loosen her dress (as she is having a panic attack) and they are caught in this position. Oopsie. Worse, a very expensive and meaningful sapphire necklace she had around her neck, is no longer there. Where are the jewels? Everyone suspects Sarah.

Fast forward three years later, you learn Sarah left that night with the help of St. John's stepmother, and ends up in a town a few hours away. However, St. John is told she drown in a river. He fled to another country after a duel (to the man who helped Sarah loosen her dress) and worked but is now back in London. St. John finds a secret letter in his stepmother's desk that clues him into the fact that Sarah is very much still alive. He races to the village town to find her – and demand the jewels back! Let me stop and say – Sarah is very wealthy, the reason St. John married her – for her dowry, so why would she need to steal jewels? I don't know.

Anyway, he finds her and I wanted him to be pissed and growly and demand things from her. Instead, not a lot happens. They pitter-patter around the town for a while. And then he realizes she is more mature, and she realizes he is more mature and he thinks about wooing her – but then eventually he threatens her with something, forcing her to move back to London with him.

Far into the book, past the halfway mark, he still thinks Sarah is a liar. I got tired of that. If St. John wanted to think she was a liar fine, but I needed him to be more intense. My biggest frustration is – why did St. John race to find Sarah when he found out she was alive? They were married for two weeks. They didn't like each other. I don't get it. Just to prove she is a liar? To claim his wife? I wanted passion between them. For him to drop everything and demand his wife back, his demeanor was just ho-hum. I needed more fiery emotions from him.

The second half is really slow and through it all their HEA came too fast at the end.

Grade: C-

April says

To Kiss a Thief (Runaway Desires #1) by Susanna Craig is a fantastic debut Historical Romance. Set in Georgian England. What a debut!! A phenomenal new voice in Georgian Romance.

Meet, Sarah Pevensie and

St. John Sutliffe, Viscount Fairfax. Bound together in an arranged marriage, but when a scandal erupts on the night of their marriage, Sarah is persuaded to run away to a small fishing village on the coast.

With secrets abound, suspense, a bit of mystery, passion, betrayal, deceit, challenges, danger and the promise

of love everlasting, Ms. Craig has masterfully and brilliantly written a captivating tale of love and betrayal during Georgian England.

Fast paced, with engaging and charming characters. Well, actually a few not so charming, as well. Readers will be captivated, entranced and mesmerized by Ms. Craig's, skillfully written romance. "To Kiss a Thief" is one of those stories you just can't put down. An absolute delight to read! An epic love story with flawed characters, turmoil, struggles and challenges. But will St. John and Sarah find their true HEA or lose all to lies, deception, mistrust and outside influence. A must read and a true treasure! I can't wait for the next installment! Highly recommended for fans of Georgian era, romance, suspense, passion and romance.

Received for an honest review from Net Galley. However, all opinions and thoughts are my own.

Rating: 4.5

Heat rating: Mild

Reviewed by: AprilR

Tin says

Disclosure: I received this ARC via Netgalley. Thank you to Susanna Craig and Lyrical Press for the opportunity. Yes, this is an honest review.

* * *

To begin, I read this book in one night -- with all the things that are happening in my life, that's a big deal for me, because it usually takes me a week to finish one book.

Sarah Pevensey's father arranged a marriage for her with St. John Sutcliffe, Viscount Fairfax, and heir to the Marquess of Estley -- after two weeks of married life, Sarah still isn't convinced that she and St. John are a good fit. She worries about her future with St. John's coldness and indifference, but her marital problems are small compared to the problems that face her when she was found in a compromising position with another man during the ball to celebrate their marriage, and then being accused of stealing the Sutcliffe Family sapphires.

Believing her family had turned their backs on her, and believing her new mother-in-law, Sarah agrees to Lady Estley's plan to disappear from St. John's life.

It's three years later, and Sarah, as the Widow Fairfax has lived a quiet and comfortable life in the small village of Haverhythe -- she doesn't know that her husband fought a duel for her, and believing he had killed Captain Brice, the man who was with Sarah that fateful evening, quickly left the country and set off for the West Indies.

But St. John is back, and, when he discovers that his wife had not died (as his family had told him), sets out to find her -- intending to conclude the unfinished business between them. He wants to discover what happened to her that night, and what happened to his family's sapphires.

It's a strange reunion for our estranged couple who never wanted to be married to each other, but I have to admire St. John's determination to honor his marriage vows, even when Sarah offers him a way out. It's one of the many questions that the author addresses in her story: how do you convince two married people in an arranged marriage that there is a happily-ever-after for them? Would Sarah's perceived indiscretion matter?

Would the missing sapphire necklace matter? Should they?

Their first foray into their marriage didn't start off well, but Sarah and St. John have an opportunity to try again -- but, can they build a new relationship on a foundation of unanswered questions? It doesn't help that Sarah never gives St. John a direct answer, but, instead, constantly challenges his faith in her by letting him arrive to his own conclusions based on what he observes of her.

This is a novel that has a lot of twists and surprises, but none of them are unexpected -- the author does a wonderful job of leaving enough hints and clues, so that we, too, can come to our own conclusion about who is/are responsible for the tangle that Sarah and St. John find themselves in.

It's truly a compelling read from beginning to end.

To Kiss a Thief is Book 1 in Susanna Craig's *Runaway Desires* series and her debut novel.

Amy ~ Love At 1st Read says

What a fabulous start to what promises to be a phenomenal new series! *To Kiss A Thief* by new-to-me-author Susanna Craig kept me up well into the wee hours and was worth every minute of lost sleep.

Sarah Pevensy Sutliffe has a disaster of a nuptial ball. Not only does she overhear her husband of two weeks declare that he could never love her, but she is also caught in a compromising position she cannot explain and is accused of stealing the beloved Sutliffe family jewels. To avoid scandal and misery, she flees her new home.

St. John, Viscount Fairfax, believes love is for the weak and foolish. The catastrophe of his nuptial ball only proved love was not a risk worth taking. So why, after three years, can he not stop thinking about Sarah? When he discovers where Sarah has been all this time, he sets out to prove what a thief she is. But the Sarah he finds is not what he expected. And this woman could very well steal his heart.

This story starts out with a bang and doesn't let up! I was sucked into it from the beginning and couldn't put it down.

Sarah Sutliffe had dreamed of being desired for more than her dowry, but it was that very money that attracted the Sutliffe family. Although she knew her marriage was a business arrangement, she hoped it would lead to the fairy tale romance she'd always dreamed of.

St. John didn't believe in fairy tales. He had no heart to give. How could he ever fall in love with a wife who was forced on him? He married Sarah only to save his family estate, and so he spent his brief time with her determined to know as little about her as possible. He consummated the marriage but "held himself in check, knowing that to give anything more would be to give everything".

After discovering where Sarah had been for the last three years, St. John set out to prove what a light skirt and thief she was. He imagined Sarah living in luxury on the profits of the stolen jewels. Perhaps with a lover. But what he found was a woman raising her child in a rundown cottage situated in a fishing village. She had very little more than the generosity of others on which to live. Yet she seemed content there and involved with the improvement of the small village. That spark he thought had burned out three years ago begins to flame again the more he is around Sarah. Could he be in love with a woman who had likely betrayed him and stolen a family heirloom? Falling in love with his wife might very well be "the most foolish and the bravest thing he had ever done".

Likewise, when St. John arrives in the village of Haverhythe, he seems unlike the man that turned his back

on Sarah three years ago. This man who played with her daughter and helped the community was completely different. How could Sarah still have the slightest attraction or longing for this man after what she'd endured? She'd seen enough of life that she should abandon her dream of a fairy tale romance. He had broken her heart once. If she allowed him to break her heart again, she would lose more than a husband. She could also lose her child. Yet, although he was a danger to her, "some small part of her wanted to throw itself in harm's way".

I am anxious to read more of this series. Ms. Craig has a real talent for weaving a story. To Kiss a Thief is filled with engaging characters that make you want to keep reading. Not just the main characters, but the secondary characters as well are so well crafted. Her vivid descriptions bring the setting to life and really add vibrancy to the story. And oh the story! A beautiful depiction of two people struggling to obtain what their heart wants.

I was given an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review. What a delight to be introduced to such an amazing author!

Wollstonecraftomegirl says

There is much to be said for simplicity. There's certainly much to be said for simplicity done well. Craig missed that memo. It's particularly annoying because, actually, the fundamentals of her historical writing are sound. The language is period appropriate, I didn't spot any glaring anachronisms and she has a nice way with description.

Shame about the rest of it.

The book starts with some complicated multiple perspective ~dramaz~ The heroine - daughter of a merchant - newly married to the impecunious aristocrat hero, is caught in a compromising position with another man, by seemingly every member of her family and extended family. If that isn't bad enough, the expensive necklace she's wearing is gone. We learn that she doesn't really know what's happened (too much wine), but she is in love with her aloof, remote aristo husband. And, in fact, she'd only been wandering around the party alone because she'd seen the hero with another woman. Terribly tragic, you see.

I think (the motivations of characters for certain actions at certain times are often hazy, to say the very least) because she's worried about being accused of theft and possibly because of the embarrassment, she agrees to a plan proposed by her husband's step mother that she will fake her death and move away. I mean, this makes no sense, but I thought it would be a prelude (this all happens in the prologue) to her living a quiet life and the husband finding her and some quiet, romantic story of love growing organically would ensue.

Alas, t'was not to be.

The husband challenges the guy the heroine was with to a duel, unbeknownst to the heroine. He nearly kills him and so does a bunk to the Caribbean or some foreign realm where he learns much about himself and the world (spoiler: slavery bad, and a useful way for powerful white guys to learn that the world is tough). Except: he doesn't actually learn anything or change, it's just something that takes place off page and then is

randomly referenced at odd points during the rest of the book. It's not organically built into his character and it has no real impact on anything.

He comes back. Visits evils stepmother and discovers that she lied about his wife being dead. Instead of calling her out on this behaviour, he goes to the village where his wife is staying. Perhaps he goes to her because in their short marriage he loved her too, or maybe not. Perhaps because he wants a divorce, or revenge. Seriously, his motivations throughout were horribly unclear and he's a completely confused and very unlikeable character because of it.

Instead of his wife explaining to him that she didn't steal any jewels and that his stepmother persuaded her to fake her death and is funding her lifestyle now, she says nothing and so the book just allows this great mistrust to continue between them.

This is a recurring problem throughout: *just talk to one another for the love of God.*

The heroine has been pretending to be a widow, so he pretends to be her long lost soldier husband. It's all really clunky, but if you drink three large G&Ts whilst reading you get mellow enough that you look past the baffling details and just see the blurry whole.

Turns out the wife has had a baby! Perhaps it's his! Or perhaps not! But it's certainly cute! Again, the wife doesn't just come out and say: I did not cheat, the kid is yours. So husband is left wondering and in his mind accusing her of being alternately a thief and/or a whore.

In spite of all those lingering issues. He stays in the village and finds his wife is the centre of village life. She teaches the piano and she plays like a prodigy (guess how he reacts to her music? Hint: he's a fan). She's charitable and organising a fete and a dance. There follows a short period of, what I think of as rom-com romance, or Tessa Dare romance, if you will. He bonds with the locals (there's a baker with kittens! And a hearty publican! A characterful sailor's widow!) He helps build the fete (man in shirtsleeves!) and they dance (he doesn't suck!). The kid nearly drowns and he saves her and it's all terrifying and then obviously absolutely fine in the end (by which I mean, three pages later). He tells her about the Caribbean and it's supposed to be deep and meaningful.

But she's still a thief and a whore, oh, and kind of ugly too. But he is captivated by her, because of course he is. So they have sex in a fisherman's hut and are interrupted straight afterwards, when the heroine is still half undressed, by a local who tells them that - horrors! -the fete has been cancelled. This leads to the hero going to see the local landowner and outing his wife as (a) not dead and (b) a jewel thief and (c) a harlot because apparently the whole Ton still remembers the scandal and the story spreads from the staff at the Big House down to the village.

Ultimately – I could explain how (possibly) but I really cannot be bothered - this precipitates him dragging the heroine and kid back to life at his country estate. Everyone learns, seemingly without any major drama, that the heroine isn't dead. Then we discover that the money she bought to the marriage was tied up in marriage settlements which would be paid out in small increments only if she was living with her husband. This made me ragey. The whole point of the marriage was to secure the crumbling family with much needed funds and, yet, they're tied up in some scheme which was rendered impossible by the stepmother telling the heroine to fake her death. So have this impecunious family just gone three years without money? Why does everyone do what the stepmother says? Why has the stepmother become close to the woman the hero apparently cheated with? Why is that woman at the house party for the heroine? Why are they throwing a house party for the heroine when she is a thief and a whore and faked her own death? WHAT. IS.

HAPPENING.

So, the hero has to play nice with the heroine because of the marriage settlements. Oh, and there's an extra £10k in it for the family if she has a boy.

Turns out though, that's fine, because by now he's decided that he doesn't think she's a thief or a whore and he's known all along that the kid was his and he loves her anyway.

And at that point, dear reader, I decided I had given this book my absolute best. 72% isn't bad, right? That's a solid respectable mark in most examinations. I tried. I hoped. I thought, perhaps, Craig would reign it in and we might end up with something worthwhile. But if it hasn't happened by 72%, it's probably a fair assumption that the last 28% cannot salvage it.

This review has been a roving, random mass of confusion.

Nonetheless, I can say with confidence: Still less confusing and random than the book.

Craig can write, but this whole novel needed a tranquilliser dart and the assistance of a brave and ruthless editor. I will look out for reviews of her books in the future. If someone I trust gets in there and gives her a thumbs up, I will give her another go, but I don't plan on reading anything else she's written until that happens.

Belinda says

This was an exciting and marvelous read from a brand new author. She has written a fabulous story that will grab the reader from the first page. The characters were developed with thoughts and feelings of their own. I liked how the story flowed throughout the book keeping my interest.

St. John Sutcliffe had to marry for money per his father's instructions. He really didn't want to be forced to marry Sarah Pevensey, to keep his family from being destitute. After they are married, Sarah is caught in a scandal about stolen family jewels, and they blame Sarah. She knows that she didn't do it, but no one will believe her especially her husband. Sarah flees London and winds up in a little village to start a new. She finds peace within the little community and finds life bearable with the friends she makes.

When St. Just returns home after three years abroad, he finds out about his presumed dead wife is alive and living in a village. He wants to see how the woman he never forgot lives with the money she made with the jewels. He will confront her as the thief she is and shame her. But when St. Just arrives, he sees a completely different woman he married. She is not living the high life he thought she was and sees a woman with her own mind.

Oh, I wished Sarah would have made him grovel a bit, but she did hold out for a while. She has always loved him but he will only hurt her again if she lets him. St. Just must find it himself to give Sarah a reason to forgive him for doubting her. These two have conflicts and it will take a true love to bring them together to see each other with different eyes.

I appreciate Net Galley for this ARC title in which I gave an honest review.

Zoe says

I like the style so if this is the debut novel, I will be willing to try her ext book.

I cannot rate this book higher because the hero St. John seemed kind of like an ass to me. Now, I do not have a very active asshole radar. So for me to say a hero seemed like an ass, that is quite a statement. St. John was forced to marry Sarah for her dowry and was determined to stay away from her as much as he could. To be nice or civil to her would be like surrendering to his father's manipulation. So St. John was heard by Sarah that he "would never love his wife" to a woman who appeared to have a close relationship with him. Then Sarah was caught in a compromising situation with another man while being suspected to have stolen St. John's family heirloom. Sarah was coerced into agreeing to disappear. St. John did not believe in her innocence and readily accepted her appearance as first an admittance of guilt and later, death.

3 years later St. John returned his seafaring hiatus from Society and found out from his step mother by accident that Sarah did not die. He set off to find her and find her he did, together with a 2.5 year old daughter.

Overall this is a plot that has been done many times. I did not find it to be anything special. With few surprises, this is a steady read where experienced readers already know from page 10 what is going to happen. I did found it unnecessary though, to put the heroine in a compromising situation with another man AND being accused of stealing jewelry from her husband's family? And of course within 2 week of marriage, Sarah got pregnant and then was blackmailed into abandoning her marriage. Can't a girl catch a break?

Back to St. John being an ass, I also did not understand his motives. He was quick to believing the worst about Sarah, but not seeing her for 3 years, all of the sudden, he wanted her back? What triggered his change of mind? What happened between now and then? From this reader's point of view, nothing. But St. John went from believing the worst to insisting that Sarah was his wife and must come back with him in a blink of an eye. I had to stop myself from snorting at how convenient things were.

*The review is for an ARC provided on NetGalley.

Rachel- Goodbye Borders says

St John needed to marry for money. He resented and hated that. His father picked out Sarah, a rich merchant's daughter. During their courtship and for the first weeks of their marriage, St John remained aloof, resentful and determined not to care. Sarah, meanwhile, dreams of a love match and does fall in love with her husband. She overhears him telling a friend of his something that she doesn't want to hear. Distraught, she ends up in a situation where she finds herself both accused of stealing, but also of cheating. No one stands up for her or defends her. So, at her mother-in-law's suggestion, she runs.

After the prologue, the book picks up 3 years later. St John and Sarah were both well developed and layered characters that I liked. I had sympathy for both, but more for Sarah. She had no one in her corner and it was hard when St John would think the worst of her. Often. St John was harder to like because of his willingness to believe the worst of Sarah. However, that made it all the sweeter when he fell in love. In the beginning, they were both immature. At the end, because of what happened in the three years they were apart, they had more life experience and were so much the better for it.

I also appreciated the historical note at the end in regards to the slave trade. I am definitely interested in more of this author's works.

Moriah says

Susanna Craig's debut novel kept me engaged from beginning to end. Forced to marry the daughter of a wealthy merchant to bring much needed money to the family, St. John Sutcliffe married Sarah Pevensey, but within weeks, he finds her in a compromising position and the a sapphire family necklace she was wearing missing. Presumed to be a thief, Sarah is convinced by her mother-in-law that fleeing and moving faraway is her best option instead of staying to argue her innocence. Three years later, St. John has returned from the West Indies to find out that his presumed dead wife is alive and well and apparently blackmailing his step-mother. Determined to deal with Sarah, St. John travels to the small fishing village where Sarah has been living and finds that his perception of her character to be far from reality. After fleeing three years ago, Sarah found herself with very limited resources and with no one to turn to. Making the best of her situation, Sarah made a life for herself in the fishing village and worked to make life better for everyone in the village. From assisting a widow who was soon to be homeless to starting a fund for fisherman who are injured or die, Sarah is a warm-hearted woman who bears no resemblance to the woman St. John expected to find. Even more shocking is the revelation Sarah has a small child who can only be his. I really enjoyed the story's focus on a couple coming to trust each other despite their difficult past together, and St. John learning that risking your heart can lead to the greatest rewards. Both Sarah and St. John were sympathetic and their unwillingness to trust each other made sense in relation to past events. I am looking forward to the next title from this new author - if it is as good as this one it will be a book well worth reading.

Tracy Emro says

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review

3.5 stars

I can find no fault in the writing of this book - it flows well and the writing is excellent. My problem with the book was the hero.

St. John was very hard for me to understand - he says he doesn't love his wife and will never love her - but runs away after a duel for three years because he is scared of his feelings for her. Then when he returns, he seeks her out (to find the stolen jewels) - but doesn't believe that she is innocent and doesn't believe that she was faithful to him, he also doesn't really believe that her daughter is his child - then he begins to think he was wrong about her - but then does an about face again and doesn't believe her. It was confusing and hard to follow his POV.

Sarah wasn't much better - she declares she is innocent - but runs away. OK, the first time I understood - she was young and it seemed that everyone had turned against her - but three years later, she tries to run away again?

I really don't know when St. John fell in love with Sarah - because at the 70% mark of the book - he still thought she was a lair. But suddenly - and I do mean suddenly - he believes her and stands up to his family in

her defense. I don't know if the author was trying to make St. John seem like he was in denial of his feelings from the very beginning of their marriage or if he got to know her later and he was having a hard time reconciling his feelings - I really couldn't tell, so I couldn't tell you when or why he fell in love with her.

I really didn't think the initial scandal of the stolen jewels was a very believable plot - Sarah is rich - that is why St. John married her - she doesn't need to steal the jewels - so why does everyone believe that she would steal them? It makes no sense - however, the compromising situation she was caught in was believable and I think would have made a much better reason for her running away.

I think for a debut novel - this was much better than most and I think that this is an author to watch - with a little more polish and experience, she will no doubt be a must read type of author.

I would recommend this book and I will definitely be reading the next book in the series!

Lisa Day says

I have known Susanna Craig since 2001, when both of us came to our university as new faculty members. Over the years, she and I have worked closely, often on the same page when it comes to standards of writing and research, despite our pond-crossing affiliations with British Literature and American Literature. When I found out she was moonlighting as a romance novelist, I had to check the calendar. Was it an April Fools joke? Good one! Then I realized she was serious. I was probably one of the colleagues she feared would scoff at such a pursuit, but I heartily responded to this news, mostly because I thoroughly envy the ability of any full-time literature professor who embarks on a totally different genre of writing than our usual scholarly-academic publishing efforts.

Historical romance novels? Not my thing. As an American Literature PhD, the closest I have come to liking historical romance is *The Scarlet Letter* —perhaps historical anti-romance? I didn't even read romance novels as a teen. While my sister whizzed through a stack of Harlequin Romances every week, I read Stephen King and John Saul. My sister read *Sweet Savage Love* as I read stories of possessed dogs, cats, and cars and creepy clowns hiding in gutters—equally frightening plots.

However, knowing Susanna's intellect, her wry humor, and her unflagging feminism, not to mention her outstanding writing skill, I pre-ordered her first novel. I admit: I worried I wouldn't like it. One of her 18th Century British Novel students once audaciously asked her, "Do you really like this stuff?" Similarly, I worried that I wouldn't like her literary foray because of its similarity to books I'd been required to read in college involving stuffy, pretentious characters addressing each other by title or initial only—"Mr. B----," "Mr. Darcy," Lord This, Sir That—and the women who addressed the men in such a distancing manner were institutionalized somehow, either in hospital or in defeated, dependent, dead-end marriage. Yet, because Susanna is my friend as well as a highly respected colleague, I gave her novel with the beautiful cover a chance.

As soon as I read the acknowledgements, I knew I was in for something...different. For those of us who know Susanna and her biggest fan, her concluding note to her husband is no surprise: he "has supported me through the tears and the fears, too much take-out, too little house-cleaning, early mornings, late nights, and all the other tortures writers put their loved ones through. I'm blessed to have you for my biggest fan, and I hope you know I'm yours." *I hope you know I'm yours!* Insert fanning motions!

What I soon discovered was *To Kiss a Thief* is no average bodice-ripper. Not one stuffy character. No pretension without critique alongside it. In this book, a woman's agency and independence are key to the plot. Female friendship is what saves women's lives. Passion is female-focused and quite steamy. An overarching theme is the "ugly reality" of the Midatlantic Slave Trade, and both Sarah and her husband St. John come face to face with the humanity of human trafficking and the unethical practice of slavery in general.

My reading experience was an excellent one, if it isn't already clear. I eagerly await the appearance of *To Tempt an Heiress* and *To Seduce a Stranger* and any other infinitive+object titles that come from Susanna Craig's imagination.

Krystal says

It was hard to believe when reading this that it was a debut novel! I thoroughly enjoyed everything about this novel! It was set up nicely in the beginning (with the jewels going missing and the scandal in which that was discovered), and only continued to improve from there. It was obvious pretty much from the start that this author has a gift in story-telling. She was able to weave together the different events and locations in such a way that the reader actually felt that they were there. I could almost smell the salt water as they stood on the quay.

As for the characters? It was evident during the entirety of this story, that there was character growth (even when it wasn't completely evident) - and I enjoyed watching these estranged lovers (for lack of a better word) find each other all over again. Even the "minor" characters (aka the ones who weren't in every scene) were well thought out and added something to the overall plot of the story. I especially liked the outright gossip that came about - everyone knows gossip was an important part of life back then (and even now), but these characters did nothing without a reason. And even that caught my interest - trying to figure out just why.

Overall - I would recommend this story to anyone who enjoys a good historical novel . I would definitely read more by this author!

DISCLAIMER: I received a complimentary copy of this novel in exchange for my honest review. This has not affected my review in any way. All thoughts and opinions expressed in this review are 100% my own.

Christine Wallflower & Dark Romance Junkie says

4.5 Stars

I always feel as if I've hit jackpot when I find a really angsty historical romance to gorge myself on. *To Kiss a Thief* by Susanna Craig was an angst filled historical romance, whose two main characters had to fight against all the odds including themselves to be together. The story starts off with a beautifully painful catalyst, our heroine Sarah a newly wed is found in a compromising position with a man who is not her husband, and to make it worse she's accused of theft. My heart was in my throat as her parents looked on while accusations were thrown at her and while her husband the hero of the story looked on without a word before he finally left. At this point I thought everyone in this book aside from Sarah was a jerk.

The story picks up 3 years later when St John realises the truth of his wife's whereabouts, his wife is not dead and she is closer than he ever thought. I feel like I have to warn anyone wanting to read this book, St John was a jerk in the very beginning, he was cold and at times cruel. He treated Sarah terribly but there are reasons and the author allows the reader to delve deeper into his character. St John and Sarah's marriage was arranged, St John's family needed Sarah's money and Sarah's family married her off for the title and the connections it would bring. Sarah's introduction to the ton was doomed from the very beginning, and as much as she hoped her husband would one day feel something for her, his actions showed it could never happen.

The heroines character was not very complex, all Sarah had ever wanted was love and acceptance, her innocence was probably what got her hurt in the first place, but you can't help but love her. When St John was told to marry Sarah, he resented his father, being forced to marry a woman below his station was the worst of punishments. Yes I really loved St John's character, yes he was flawed and treated Sarah horribly. But he was redeemable.

He was beginning to know his own heart, but until he felt more certain of hers, it would be far wiser to hold his tongue.

The story is rich in vapid characters out to hurt the heroine and at times I felt like walloping St John over the head because all it would take was for him to stand up for her, but because of his doubts he would look on and allow her to suffer. GRRR. I'll leave it at that but if you enjoy angst and HR with heroes who are hard to love and heroines who have an air of innocence, but still show strength, then you should probably give this a go!

"St John. But..."

He shook his head. "Once more," he said, lifting his finger away to replace it with a gentle, searching kiss.

"St. John," she breathed when their lips parted.

She felt rather than saw his smile.

"Better. Now... you were saying?"

What had she been saying?

ARC kindly provided by publisher in return for an honest review

Samantha says

ARC, NetGalley, &c

I've had to let this one percolate. A disappointment from start to finish. Flimsy premise, deeply unlikeable hero, heroine who was honestly doing her best given the circumstances, *extremely* sloppy and offensive handling of a delicate issue, i.e., slavery. Maybe white readers might have had an easier time with this? I'm not white. Never mind, I'm getting ahead of myself.

THE PLOT: A sort of bog standard, impoverished noble family needs **filthy lucre** to renovate their crumbling estates; nouveau riche merchant family wants a Title for their daughter; arranged marriage

happens. No one is happy, obstacles to happiness are overcome, HEA ensues.

This purports to be a Georgian, but there's nothing particularly Georgian about it but maybe a few clothing descriptions and the fact that the West Indies and not actual India is where the hero goes to do his character development and get a Sexy, Ungentlemanly Tan™.

THE ACTUAL PLOT: Sarah Sutcliffe is eighteen years old, sheltered, and has the super hots for her new husband, St. John, to whom she has been married for all of two weeks, and who clearly does not want to be married to her. Like, at all. On the night of her wedding ball, she overhears him whispering sweet nothings to a female childhood friend. So she runs off, gets a little tipsy, and ends up in another man's lap with her titty out. Everyone, naturally, walks in. (Wow, this was clearly arranged by the villain of the piece, my honed romance reader instincts say.) To make matters worse, she's lost the family's signature jewels, a sapphire necklace. Things are about to get real bad for her.

UNTIL..... her evil stepmother offers her an out: just run away to a little place in the middle of nowhere. So, like an eighteen-year-old, she does. Everything about Sarah that has nothing to do with her husband's dick, I actually really like: she's independent, she's--this is barely a spoiler, secret babies are a dime a dozen--risen up under the pressures of being an "widow" whose child is rumored to be a bastard, she's done her best to improve the town she's hiding in. Good girl.

And then we get a look into St. John Sutcliffe's head. Our Hero: bog standard jackass with daddy issues, straight out of central casting.

Look. Daddy issues peaked in 1995, with *Lord of Scoundrels*, aka the Evangelion of romance novels. Daddy issues are just not inherently interesting. You gotta be a god tier character writer to pull them off, and Susanna Craig emphatically does not have the range. From what I can tell, we're expected to believe *St. John had cultivated a pose of studied indifference to the world for so long and Years of practiced indifference had built a shell of ice around his heart*-- and so on and so forth. Aight, I like an Iceman Hero, but... from what the author gives us, St. John got a few whoopings as a kid, and his dad is kind of mean, and that's about it. Nothing horrendous enough to justify what an enormous dick he is. All child abuse is horrible and traumatizing--yes--but I expect some narrative followthrough in my fiction.

Anyway, three years later, he comes back to England goes in search of his family jewels, and he just--turns up in Sarah's new life, upends it, threatens to take her kid away regardless of whether it's actually his, because she is a *slut*, he knows it to be true (and the less said about this kid, the better, I normally don't mind a plot muppet but this is a truly insufferable plot muppet), gradually realizes that all his awful assumptions are true and maybe the picture he formed that night he found her on Some Dude's lap was wrong. Sure.

At no point does he try to rise above his daddy issues. At no point does he actively try to become a doper person; as Sarah forgives him--for whatever unfathomable reason, narrative necessity, straight up not knowing any better--so are we, as the reader. I'm not buying it.

And here's the other reason we're meant to buy St. John's nonstarter of a redemption arc: like Sarah, he ran away; unlike Sarah, he ran away to the West Indies and got a job as a clerk on a plantation, and saw some bad shit there. I was already pretty queasy about how the author was going to handle it as a plot element as of this bit:

Sarah nodded absently, still watching Clarissa on the floor. "Have you spent much time with

children, my lord?"

"A little," he said, recalling the eager, innocent black faces that had surrounded him on his every visit to the slaves' quarters on Harper's Hill Plantation.

(37%)

The narrative then moves on to how this plot moppet who may or may not be his daughter has melted his heart, etc. etc., and nothing else. Just... little black faces. Interchangeable little black faces. And then the author proceeds to drop every ball it is possible to drop the next time slavery comes up. Our Hero relates a story about a black woman sneaking onto a ship to find her child and subsequently drowning them both, but it's all about *him* and *his inaction* and *his* failure to save this absolute stranger, and the stain that his has left on *his* soul, and the way I'm putting it here, it sounds like it might be slightly compelling, but it's not. It's not.

"[The people trying to get the woman and her kid out of the water] were... unsuccessful. The crowd broke up and went their separate ways, almost as if nothing had happened."

She hesitated. "And you?"

"I went back to the pub and--and tried to wash away the memory," he concluded, with a shake of his head.

Perhaps she was right. Perhaps he *was* an unfeeling monster. And perhaps that ugly truth was not to be regretted--after all, *feeling* caused nothing but trouble and pain.

This! Is horrible! It does not get any better from here.

"And did you succeed?" she asked.

"No." The word passed his lips reluctantly. "Try as I might, I never could." [...] "But I might have done something."

"You did." She brushed his sleeve with her fingertips and then pulled back again. "You let that woman choose her fate. And then you saved [the plot moppet, who almost drowned a little bit ago] with what you learned that day. Let those things wipe away a bit of your guilt."

"Can guilt ever really be expunged?"

Onward to:

Three years in Antigua had forced him to consider how much of his won life--and the lives of almost everyone he knew--had been made possible by the inhuman toil and suffering. It had been a most uncomfortable reckoning.

A most uncomfortable reckoning. What a fucking mild way to put it. "I, a wealthy white man, witnessed the incredible pain and suffering of brown people, and all I got was this lousy tee-shirt, and a little bit of angst." It all gets dumped in this one little scene, and is not carried forward through the novel. It's a bigger theme than this writer's abilities and this shitty stock plot is capable of handling with any grace.

For example, the evil stepmother (who turns out to be a bit toothless, in the end) expresses her disappointment that St. John never brought her back a cute little black page; that's just dropped as an awful thing an awful person said, and it's not interrogated, not questioned, as I scream into my Kindle and contemplate giving this an immediate DNF. After all that, all the reaction we get is, "Sarah bit her tongue."

And, you know what, one good thing this novel has done for me is to force me to look at India and the suffering of the Indian people being the stock "let's not think too hard about British imperialism, guys" location in romance novels. If one insensitive, thoughtless treatment of colonialism is this awful, I am so sorry for my SE Asian sisters, who potentially have to deal with it every time they pick a historical romance up.

The author's note at the end adds this absolute fucking slap in the face:

In the Runaway Desires series, characters confront this ugly reality, come to terms with their roles in it, and challenge it when they can. In this, as in so many ways, the heroes and heroines of romance are unfortunately far from typical.

Nothing is confronted, here. Nothing is challenged. Nothing is come to terms with! Slavery exists as a backdrop for white people to feel bad about themselves, and that's about it.

This is not even to mention the disappointing denouement--would that every novel could put its actual villain in a rowboat, never to be heard from again. The charmless stock characters in the town Sarah is hiding in--maybe "charmless" is a little harsh, but they don't have any life to them. Heyer, this is not. The bizarre tone shift at the end. The treatment of domestic violence, which is nearly as patronizing and shallow as the treatment of slavery, and so on and so forth.

I wouldn't recommend this to anyone. The summary of the next book in the series looks even worse, on the slavery front, and I will not read it.

Nice cover, though! Real nice cover. I'd consider this giving this an extra star for the cover... and the rowboat.

Lyuda says

2.5 stars.

A tale of an arranged marriage between an impoverished nobleman and a merchant daughter is nothing new. It has been done hundreds of times before. But I'm a sucker for this type of plot, so I decided to give this debut a try.

I found this novel well-written with good sense of historical setting but it relied too much on my least favorite plot device- misunderstandings. The biggest problem for me, though, was the romance itself. For most of the story I wasn't sure if the hero even liked the heroine. The only thing for sure- I didn't like the hero.

Normally, in the trope like this, a gentleman **inherits** the dilapidated estate or gambling debts from his predecessors and the marriage is the only way to restore what is lost. In this story, the hero's father is very much alive and kicking and the way the story unfolds, it's clear that the funds were not really needed. Don't get me wrong, I'm all for infusion of new lines in the familiar trope but I don't think this was a winning one. The hero was old enough to be fairly independent. The father was unaffectionate disciplinarian but not a cruel despot. There was no love lost between the father and the son. Therefore, it was puzzling to see the hero's easy conformance to his father's and stepmother's wishes on not only marriage but later when dealing with his wife. It made the hero somewhat immature wishy-washy weakling. With all his declarations of love at the end, I couldn't shake the feeling it wasn't enough. It didn't help that the reader was privy to the hero's inner thoughts and, normally, it would provide some excuse for the character's actions, but in this case it only made me dislike him even more. Maybe with better characterization and focus, he could've been different and his changed-man attitude more believable but as it is- no, not my type of hero. And he didn't deserve the heroine at all. From naïve and innocent girl to a strong and capable woman, her transformation was really admirable. She took charge of her life and made the best of her circumstances. I only wish she had a better man to share it with.
