



## A Dangerous Beauty

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Love, n. A temporary insanity curable by marriage or by the removal of the patient from the influences under which he incurred the disorder.

*The Devil's Dictionary*, Ambrose Bierce

### A Courageous Outcast . . .

Rosamunde Baird has lost everything and has no choice but to accept an invitation to spend a season with a dowager duchess and her clandestine ladies club. Determined to stay in the shadows and live quietly, she has sworn never again to come face to face with adventure and temptation, two things that brought her ruin years ago. But then the Duke of Helston dangles before her the very things she craves most . . .

### Lord Fire & Ice . . .

Mysterious Luc St. Aubyn has a much-deserved reputation for exuding blistering passion at night and frost the morning after. What demons drive this audacious war hero to hide secrets about the dowager's club and his devilish dictionary? When he's blindsided by his reactions to a virtuous siren, he has no choice but to reveal all during a scandal that will doom them . . . or save them, if only they dare to believe in love.

## A Dangerous Beauty Details

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## From Reader Review A Dangerous Beauty for online ebook

### Monique Takens says

Candlelight Historische roman 711 .

Eindelijk weer eens een goed verhaal met heel erg leuke dialogen in de Candlelight reeks . Je moet even door het onlogische begin heen maar alles wordt duidelijk bijna op het eind . Gelukkig geen eindeloos gezwijmel over brede schouders en harde spieren : ) in dit verhaal .

Dit is deel 1 van 4 delen over de weduwen club geleid door Merceditas St. Aubyn (Ata ) , douairière Hertogin van Helston .

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### Georgie says

#### 2.5 stars because, weird plot stuff

I'm going though a DNF phase at the moment - one strike and it's out. So the fact that that I finished this is - in a back-handed way - a reflection of the potential of the writing, in spite of some total no-nos.

I started reading this because of Caz's review (this, and so many other books! - thanks, Caz), and like her very nearly gave up after chapter one: the heroine, having been (apparently) compromised beyond recovery, is brow-beaten by her father and his into marriage with the man of her dreams in a scene of rather tedious melodrama.

Here I am going to indulge myself with a short (but overdue) aside on Fathers of Heroines in HR. To a man, they are distressingly two-dimensional, with well-defined stock sub-species, categorised (à la Heyer) into:-

*Mark I* - thoughtless charming gamblers, frequently dead. The Dead Gambler model generally leaves unwise mortgages and at least one soggy widow whose primary function is to be a helpless burden on the victimised heroine.

*Mark II* - benevolent old souls, often with a cloud of gossamer-like silver hair (however unlikely this is in men who can - on a strict accounting - be very little older than 45) and no money. They are also absent-minded and call the heroine "my dear", possibly because they have forgotten her real name, as they also tend to have more than usually large families. That absent-mindedness again.

*Mark III* - "You'll do as I say, young lady, or it'll be bread and water for a week." The rewards of tyranny are sweet: the Dictator Daddy model is always rich, well-connected, and enjoys fine food and wine. The natural habitat of these fathers is their study, although they have also been sighted on doorsteps, kicking undesirables down into the mud.

The fathers of heroes are generally the Mark III (Paediatric Whipping) model. It should be noted, though, as a warning to heroes' fathers everywhere, that they are more than likely to have died in freak hunting accidents before the story opens. This is obviously tough on the father in question, but it does allow the hero to suffer stoically the effects of childhood abuse while sleeping on silken sheets. [Note to self - become a Regency-era therapist next time round.]

I'd be delighted to hear of any properly nuanced exceptions to Wickham's Law of Awful Fathers. Sir Horace Stanton-Lacy is the only real candidate, and since he doesn't actually talk to his daughter during the entire book, I'm not sure he's altogether typical.

Anyway.

Back to poor Rosamunde and the brace of Mark III's bullying her into doing the Right Thing. When she (somewhat perversely) refuses to marry the duke's heir she has adored from afar, out comes the bread and water and the first of the author's brutal manipulations of the story.

*"Then her father mysteriously unlocked her door without a word and left for London with orders for the rest of the family to join him in a fortnight. Now she was ripe for the plucking.*

*"[Along came] a marriage-minded country squire [whose] chief allure was his timing and his false sympathy. The very day her father left for town, Mr. Baird appeared with flowers in his hands and the enticing offer of a marriage of convenience to a pillar of Cornish society on his lips...and the promise to shield her from gossip.*

*"Without anyone's knowledge or approval, Rosamunde fled with him to Scotland, married in haste, and repented not in leisure."* (Btw, if I'm going to cavil, I'll do the thing properly - Rosamunde did repent, and in the next paragraph too.)

But the oleaginous Baird and his false flowers last little longer than this brief appearance - for, by the next chapter, we have been rushed forward eight years, beastly Baird is dead and his ashes swept under the authorial carpet with barely a pause for startled breath. Rosamunde, now homeless and alienated from her Mark III pa, has been chosen - sight unseen - to join a bizarre club of impoverished widows, chaired by the hero's grandmother. So she ends up trudging the length of England with her worldly possessions in two small suitcases ("Carrying life's possessions was hot work," incidentally) in order to join a ducal house party.

This is not thoughtful story-telling. It shows, I would say, disdain for the reader. Yes, the H & h need to be brought together in circumstances where they can become acquainted (nothing propinks like propinquity), but must the contrivances be so blatant? The first part of chapter one is dedicated to explaining how much - how very very much - Rosamunde is the apple of her father's eye. Are we to disregard this when all is changed in a moment, in the cessation of the twinkling of an eye? Certainly the heroine must be on her own, defenceless (yet brave) - that's a perfectly acceptable trope in HR - but, please, couldn't it be a little more realistic?

I think why I've got quite so hot under the collar about this is that there are actually good things in this book. What works in the story - and works really quite well - is the dialogue between principals. The duke and his grandmother, for instance -

[The duke asks] *"Have I ever let you down?"*

*She raised her penciled-in eyebrows until they almost disappeared under her fussy black lace cap.*

*"I resent that," he muttered.*

*"Did I say anything?"*

This is naturalistic speech that is amusing to read, and gives a good idea of the characters involved. Ms Nash pulls this off for the duke and Rosamunde as well - there's a lovely scene near the beginning where the duke's loose interpretation of a game's rules costs Rosamunde a prize of £500.

*"Cheater." Her voice was so low he barely made out the word.*

*"Devil's rules, Mrs. Baird, devil's rules." He turned to her as he checked the smoldering flint and priming pan. "Or perhaps just bad manners. Shall I take another shot or shall you concede, then?"*

*She ignored him as she placed the bow she had been clenching on the stand. "I suppose your rules include renegeing on debts of honor too?"*

*"Naturally. That is the beauty of them. They constantly evolve as necessary."*

*"Your logic is as sinful, I think, as you, sir."*

*"We understand each other perfectly, madam."*

All good stuff, and I decided to put the first couple of chapters behind me and read on.

But then, damn me if the author didn't decide to play around more. A potential villain is introduced, built up - and demolished within a chapter. An OW floats around, jabs a little, but is ultimately insubstantial. The duke decides on a whim to take Rosamunde out for a day's ocean sailing. Then - this is the scene I simply couldn't get over - during the interval at the theatre, Rosamunde cuts the duke's hair. I'm going to say that again. At Drury Lane Theatre, in a box, with Society wandering around, Rosamunde cuts off the duke's pony tail (they call it a queue, because he's a peer, but - trust me- it's a pony tail). This is the scene, because this is so absurd I'd forgive you for not believing me.

[Rosamunde says -] *"I would like you to give me a lock of your hair."*

... *"Dare I ask why you want it?"*

*"I'd hoped you wouldn't ask," she replied softly.*

... *"Why not? I assume you've brought your gardening sheers," he said archly. "Or some other suitable lethal weapon appropriate for attending the theatre."*

*"Of course," she said, the sound of relief and a smile coming through the words. "Thank you."*

*He closed his eyes again when he felt her touching the tight queue he always wore. Before he could think, he said in a rush, "Cut it all."*

... *"All right," she whispered. "If you're sure."*

*"Do it."*

*He immediately heard the blades sheering off his queue, and his head felt a stone lighter.*

*"Lean back, please," she said.*

*He felt her soft hands smoothing his hair as she made a few more snips on the sides of his head.*

[I'm not even going to mention that it should be "shears", duckie - her gardening "sheers" are, like, see-through dresses for weeding in.]

This is an author who can write good witty dialogue, who can create characters (who *mostly* stay in character), but who - every now and then - decides to drive a coach and four through sense and my sensibilities. How can someone not have said, "Sophia, love, this is just plain daft"? Well, *I'm* calling her out on it - this is plain daft and makes me feel played.

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## Ridley says

Rosamunde is the stereotypical widow whose husband was a total douche. Of course Dr. Hero - in this book played by a duke named Lucifer - will heal her with the power of love, but not until the author has dragged the story out by 100 pages with a Big Misunderstanding.

The novel starts off well enough. Luc feels bad at how his father bollixed her life up so he endeavors to befriend her. He takes her on walks, horse rides and other platonic adventures while honoring a self-imposed "no touching" rule because of her fear of men and sex.

Then, for someone sexually abused by her first husband, she sheds her fear of intimacy very quickly - in a matter of minutes - and manages mindblowing orgasms her first go-around. It whitewashes the deep emotional scars that accompany sexual abuse and, frankly, made the hero seem more predatory than nurturing.

Sexual tension thereby resolved, what to do with the other half of the book? Toss in two-dimensional villains, a bizarre bout with blindness, and denial of love at all costs then stir over low heat.

I finished this book only out of a sense of duty. At page 220 I wanted to close the book at walk away. What could have been a lovely story about two damaged souls slowly healing each other turned into an exasperating exercise in misunderstandings.

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### **Juliana Philippa says**

**(4.5 stars)** Sophia Nash is a relatively new author to the genre, so although I really enjoyed this book (obviously, since I gave it 4.5 stars), I think she needs to work a little more on making all of the puzzle pieces and threads come together. There were some holes in the H&H's stories/pasts that were hinted at or given to us in bits and pieces; also, the heroine's estrangement from her family needed to be worked on a little, because it was hard to believe that it lasted eight years if both sides had actually wanted to reunite - it was sabotaged by outside evil forces, but if they had both wanted to end the estrangement it was hard to believe that even with that obstacle it lasted so long. I definitely liked the book and Nash is an author-to-watch for me!

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### **Nicole McCrea says**

It was fine. Scenes of their courtship was cute and I liked the relationship between Luc and his grandmother. Aside from that, many parts of this book were confusing or lackluster. Luc seems troubled and disturbed that Rosamunde had flung herself at his brother. And...then it's forgotten. Nothing is mentioned, nothing deeper comes out of it, and the I wonder why the author had our heroine love his brother anyway. Could have been anyone for all we explore the issue.

I really dislike when a heroine has a traumatic past, in large part to her family, and it's conveniently forgotten under the guise of forgiveness. It reeks of poorly fleshed out characters and an inability to settle real conflict.

What I dislike more is when a heroine has a traumatic past and the hero exploits it. Example: "He hated forcing her to speak, but like a perverse voyeur he had to know the full horror of how she'd lived." Really? I mean, really?! This is how the hero learns about her past? She doesn't come to trust him and confide in him. He doesn't decide that her trauma does not define her. Instead, he likens himself to a "perverse voyeur." Truly, the romance is astonishing.

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### **Carrie Olguin says**

Amusing and touching story of two tortured souls finding redemption by learning how to love each other.

The first chapter is necessary backstory told simply and quickly in an omni-present POV. Chapter two begins eight years later where the heart of the romance begins.

The dialogue is witty, the characters complex, the plot simple but elegant. (I love when dukes behave like the powerful men the title gives them. This duke plays by the Devil's Rules - which means he decides when or if any rules apply).

I loved the hero's wager with the heroine. He allowed her five shots (arrows) in the center of the target and would pay her 100 pounds for every one that remained after he took his five shots. She shoots four out of five arrows into the center.

His turn? He pulls out a pistol and shoots at her arrows, dislodging several. She accuses him of cheating. He replies, "I warned you I follow the Devil's Rules." Yeah, he never stated he'd shoot arrows!

Loved this story.

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### **Katie(babs) says**

The title and book cover is lovely, but other than that this newest by Nash for Avon is a major disappointment. The plot and characters were written in a way that has been done over and over again. Simply, no originality here.

The heroine Rosamunde has been harshly punished for simply kissing a young man (GASP THE HORROR!) when she was a teenager and because of that she runs away and marries a man who tortures her sexually for years because she is wanton and a sex fiend- all because of a kiss. PLEASE!

Her hasty first husband (Yes, that typical nasty first husband always found in these types of stories) has died and Rose needs to dance a jib because she is free! But she can't because she has no money and she assumes her father and brothers have all disowned her because of that scandal of the kiss. Watch as the ton and townspeople talk about her and whisper ghastly things about her.

But Rose is stronger than that and goes to a house party she was invited to by some older woman who is rich or has some title. Her grandson is also there- Luc who is nicknamed "Fire and Ice" because in bed he is a firecracker but in public he is mean and cold.

But there is something about Rose Luc likes. They have witty conversations and lovely kissing in the dark hallways of his huge mansion. Luc has a boat and watch him seduce Rose on there because she needs some pleasure and it is her decision with no one to tell her otherwise!

There is some inane plot about Luc having money problems, going blind from an illness, getting his eyesight back and some mystery with Rose's younger sister Sybil that comes out at the end.

Will Rose be forgiven from daddy dearest and will Luc marry her and continue to seduce her on his boat? That is one mystery that won't be hard to figure out.

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## Ilze says

The story had its good moments, but the book lacked continuity and ended up not making much sense.

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## Caz says

**I've given this an A for narration and a B for content at AudioGals, so that's 4.5 stars.**

**A Dangerous Beauty** is the first in Sophia Nash's ***Widows Club*** series, that was originally published between 2007 and 2010. This audiobook is a reissue of a recording originally made in 2008.

Lady Rosamunde is the apple of her father's eye. A long awaited daughter following the birth of four sons, she is bright, courageous and rather precocious, but is, when we meet her at fifteen, self-aware enough to realise those things. But, as is always the way with such romance heroines, her boisterous nature gets her into trouble when, a couple of years later, she is accused of seducing Lord Sumner, eldest son of the Duke of Helston and told in no uncertain terms that she's got to marry him. Considering all she did was kiss him on the cheek, this is a bit much, but the stentorian duke all but calls her a whore and her own – supposedly doting – father says nothing in her defence. Knowing that Sumner is, by his own admission, in love with someone else, Rosamund, instead jumps into the arms of one Mr Alfred Baird – a man she's never met before, mind you – and runs off with him to Gretna Green.

I confess that at this point, I hit 'pause' on my mp3 player, wondering whether I wanted to continue to listen to a story in which the heroine was capable of doing something that dumb.

You can read the rest of this review at AudioGals.

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## ♥?elody says

I really loved this book. The execution was very impressive and just made the entire story pretty amazing. Loved this author's style of writing. I had randomly picked this up on a whim because the cover intrigued me and the back cover description caught my interest and when I started reading it, it really surprised me. A very pleasant wonderful surprise for me. I was expecting to get the predictable plot seen in romance books but this book really grabbed me and kept surprising me. I couldn't put it down until I finished it. I loved both the hero and heroine who both have difficult dark backgrounds but come together and can't let go. A very heartbreak forlorn couple who have lots of ups and downs. Very angst emotionally-heavy story. But so very good.

The only negative I would say is the story does get dragged out a bit too long until the conclusion but the author makes up for it with the character interaction, great dialogue and wonderful ending. When I say I couldn't put this down I really mean it. I was completely sucked in and actually sad when the story ended. It's not the typical fluff light-hearted stuff you get in other romance period books which is one of the reasons why I liked it so much, it's darker, more realistic and has so much more depth. The characters in this are 3 dimensional, fully fleshed out, believable and just enthralling to read about. I almost didn't want to finish it because it was so good. If you want a real love story, with angst, heartbreak, passion and lots of drama then this is it. It had everything with a few surprises here and there. The characters in this will always stay with

me, they were very unique, very real and just heartbreaking. Great book!!!

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### **Christine says**

Rosamunde Baird grew up the apple of her father's eye and adored by her older brothers and her younger sister Sylvia. Raised by her father the Earl with the manners of a proper lady, Rosamunde's spontaneous sense of adventure lands her in great scandal when she is seen unchaperoned on a private stretch of beach giving the heir apparent Duke Henry a kiss. She refuses his marriage proposal because he admits he loves someone else and Rosamunde is then cast out by her family and banished from the parish by the local vicar, only to charge heedlessly into a marriage of convenience to a Scottish squire who is nothing but cruel to her. She's eventually widowed and forced to flee her home yet again in fear of her husband's brother and heir to the estate. Rosamunde and her ever loyal sister Sylvia are now without a home and practically penniless and have no choice but to accept the unusual invitation from the now deceased Duke's grandmother, the Dowager Duchess Merceditas 'Ata' St. Aubyn to join her secret Widow's Club.

Luc St. Aubyn is the mysterious grandson of the dowager duchess and current Duke of Helston, also known as Lord Fire & Ice for "exuding blistering passion at night and frost the morning after." He supports his grandmother's endeavor with her secret Widow's Club to help young widows find happiness again either through placement as a companion or governess or by introducing the young women to potential new husbands. The Duke normally avoids the widows altogether, but there's something special about Rosamunde that captures his attention--perhaps it's that she meets his sarcasm and wit with some of her own or perhaps he senses the dim spark that used to dance in her now sad eyes. Whatever it is, he's mesmerized by this young woman and finds himself wanting to re-ignite her verve for life.

Rosamunde's spirit has been stamped out by the betrayal, loss and abuse she has experienced from her father and then her late husband. She's lost a lot of the confidence she used to have, but she's still very courageous. She does her best to hold her head up high, which is challenging given the bleak time in her life.

Luc keeps to himself and minds his own business, which supports his mysteriousness, but part of his secrecy is also that he's writing a book under a pen name. Like Rosamunde, he's also harboring guilt over some family secrets of his own. Luc has a fantastic and intelligent sense of humor laced heavily with wit and sarcasm and a big heart, although he tries to hide the latter. He shares his sense of humor with his grandmother who is equally charming. The relationship between the duke and his grandmother is based on obvious love and respect for one another and is a wonderful bonus in this story. In fact, the dowager herself is a great character who truly added much needed kindness and compassion to Rosamunde's and the other widows' lives.

It was a joy to watch Luc rekindle Rosamunde's sense of adventure and bring a spark to her eyes again as it was likewise really nice to see Luc opening up and actually talking to someone about the sadness in his family. Luc gives Rosamunde the wonderful gift of passion and confidence--things she never thought she'd feel again in her lifetime. In return, Rosamunde shows Luc joy and wonder that depth of friendship and love can bring into one's life because for the first time in his life, he craves the company of one woman beyond just one night.

A Dangerous Beauty is a sweet story of courage and love written with an unusual but winsome combination of heartbreak and humor. The dialogue is witty, the passion sweet and sexy and the characters very likable.

A Dangerous Beauty is well written and gets 3.5 out of 5 stars from me as it could have benefitted from a bit more depth into the Helston family problems--Luc's past, Ata's past, Luc's financial problems and his need to marry an heiress. I look forward to reading more from Sophia Nash!

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### **Wendy says**

4.5 stars - a very nicely written story with a few unexpected twists and turns. The new to me narrator, Bianca Amato is a really good find - thank you, Caz.

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### **Crista says**

This is a good book. Not great, not memorable, not life-changing, just good. I'll refrain from giving a synopsis as other reviewers have done such a great job, but I will tell you why I give this 3 stars.

The torture of this heroine took place within the confines of a marriage that we are not privy to. She speaks of the marriage only in bits and pieces to the Dowager and then to Luc. This is such a huge component of this book and it's what makes her the woman that she is, however, because it is skimmed over so quickly and ineffectively, something important to empathizing and identifying with the heroine is lost.

Luc is also skimmed over. It is obvious that he has issues with his late father but again, we are left without the vital information and depth that would make us care.

I thought it was very well written. I loved the definitions from The Devil's Dictionary that was at the beginning of each chapter, and I did care about the characters...just not enough to make this anything else besides...okay.

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### **Beanbag Love says**

I liked this book. It bogged down a bit in the middle and I never quite buy the excuses for past abusive behavior from family members who instantly get forgiven, but since that seems to be typical for regencies, I shouldn't complain so much.

The leads both have issues and they're both very likable. He's cranky and she's subverted a wild streak after a bad marriage. Tragic pasts, but not so tragic you can't believe they'd ever get beyond them. There's a secret out there, though, that comes out of left field at the end and it's a little distancing. If it had been foreshadowed I think it wouldn't have been so distracting, but it seemed like it needed more time and story than it was given thrown in at the last minute as it was.

I discovered this author from an anthology where it was one of only three of the stories I liked. This story is the first of Nash's "Widows Club" series. I'll be moving on to the second book in the series next and we'll see if she can keep it up.

No huge surprises (except for the red herring at the end), but a nice, diverting romance.

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**Anna says**

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Stupidest premise ever.

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