



## The Black Hawk

*Joanna Bourne*

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**The Black Hawk** Joanna Bourne

*He is her enemy.*

*He is her lover.*

*He is her only hope.*

Someone is stalking French agent Justine DeCabrillac through London's gray streets. Under cover of the rain, the assassin strikes--and Justine staggers to the door of the one man who can save her. The man she once loved. The man she hated. Adrian Hawkhurst.

Adrian wanted the treacherous beauty known as "Owl" back in his bed, but not wounded and clinging to life. Now, as he helps her heal, the two must learn to trust each other to confront the hidden menace that's trying to kill them--and survive long enough to explore the passion simmering between them once again.

## The Black Hawk Details

Date : Published November 2011 by Penguin

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Author : Joanna Bourne

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# From Reader Review *The Black Hawk* for online ebook

## Wicked Incognito Now says

Sweet utter perfection.

My crystal ball tells me.....Nothing will live up to this for many many months.

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## Anna (Bobs Her Hair) says

Joanna Bourne is an author who elevates historical romance to another level. She's a master at fusing historic events with action, intrigue, danger, and romance. In *The Black Hawk*, Ms. Bourne's produces a gripping love story between French spy Justine "Owl" DeCabrillac and English spy Adrian "Hawker" Hawkhurst.

*"It has always been you."*

### Justine and Hawker - Their Background

Justine DeCabrillac is the daughter of French aristos who died during the French Revolution. At the age of eleven, she was forced to prostitute in a child brothel. At thirteen, Justine a.k.a. "Owl" works for the French Secret Police after being rescued by a member known as "Madame." Her loyalty is to her country, its people, and especially, Séverine, the younger sister she gave up for adoption.

Adrian Hawkhurst was born in a London slum. His mother, once of the servant class, was forced into prostitution when she became pregnant. She was beaten to death by a customer and Hawker learns to survive in the rookeries of St. Giles. By the age of ten, he's an assassin and thief for the King of Thieves. The British Service save him from this life so he may use his talents as a spy for his country.

### Their Story

The story begins in the year 1818. The Napoleonic Wars are over and Justine is now a London shopkeeper. She is on her way to British Secret Headquarters when she is stabbed with a poisoned knife. She stumbles her way to Hawker, who is now Head of the British Service Intelligence. Justine has become aware of events which threaten her former lover. Now, she appears to be the newest victim related to the mysterious conspiracy. Hawker will have to discover the truth of whether someone is out for him or Justine, or, perhaps, both of them.

The romance unfolds in series of flashback spanning twenty-four years. Hawker and Justine first meet in Paris when the when Reign of Terror ends. It's 1794, and Justine is thirteen. Both are fledgling spies for their countries. They are mature, cunning, and deadly. They read into each other's personality, work together for mutual purpose, and start a friendship. Over the years, the two spies cross paths and become lovers.

The romance between them is complicated by their occupation. They fear for the other's safety, never knowing if each meeting is the last. Their love is demonstrated in action and words.

*Justine was naked under the covers, pale and vulnerable. Bricks, hot from the oven, wrapped in flannel, were tucked up and down the bed, keeping the chill out. He'd laid her down inside that barricade. When he pulled the blanket up over her, she didn't move. She'd have a new scar when she healed. That made five. He knew the story of every one. He'd kissed them all.*

*p. 7*

The issues each has with their background is addressed. At first, Hawker is aware of the different classes they were born into. He does not obsess about it and strives to be a most skilled British agent. Justine is emotionally scarred from the time she was trained as a child prostitute. The privileged child of aristocrat parents died the night she was raped then trained as a whore. She does not identify with the people of her class and observes them with a detached alien manner.

*Under the canopy of linden trees in the great courtyard, women chattered like exotic monkeys. They pushed their chairs close together and leaned against each other and passed something back and forth to coo over it. Something small that glinted in the sun. She could not see exactly what it was – a jewel, a gilt box, a painted miniature, a bottle of perfume. One could buy anything in the shops of the arcade of the Palais Royale.*

*They were some years older than she was, entirely lighthearted and pleased with themselves. They made her feel centuries old.*

*p. 167-168*

Their age is never an issue throughout the romance. Each is old before their time. No longer innocent, they view the world in a cynical and practical way; yet, neither is cold-hearted or cruel. They develop friendships, loyalties, and maintain ties to those who are or feel like family. Justine and Adrian are just, loyal, and patriotic. Their love for one another is achingly sweet.

*He has done so much for me.*

*She gave back to him, as she knew how to do. Rose to reach for him. Took his hair strongly with her fingers and pulled his mouth to hers. Licked, teased, played with his mouth. Used all her knowledge upon him. Gloried that she knew so much.*

*Below, she clenched herself around him, where he was within her. Squeezed him tightly. She knew the muscles to use. Had practiced and practiced. She contracted against the hardness inside her. This, she could give him. This, she knew how to do.*

*p.123*

These star-crossed spies are made for each other. Justine tries to be practical about the relationship but Hawker won't have it. Certain events make their outcome seem impossible, until they have a second chance. Before that can happen, they need to find weed out a murderer/conspirator.

### Final Thoughts

Joanna Bourne is one smart sexy cool writer. Her descriptive storytelling projects like an action-thriller movie. I kept hearing the theme music to Mission Impossible. The subplots are riveting. The secondary

characters are compelling and interesting. And the setting... Despite the plot's historic setting, Ms. Bourne had me on the edge of my seat. (I know Napoleon isn't assassinated but.. STILL!) Her characters are vivid and well-rounded. The intrigue is expertly executed. The writing is divine. Now, I can't wait for Pax's story, who the author stated in a blog will have his own story. Yay!

Final Grade: A ... Five Star Solid

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

The Black Hawk is one of my most anticipated reads this year because the hero, Hawker, aka Adrian Hawkhurst, former thief, master pickpocket from the rookies of St. Giles, Head of the British Intelligence Service in 1818 Post-Napoleonic War England, has made a lasting impression based on the past three books from Joanna Bourne. The one before this, *The Forbidden Rose*, was a prequel set during the French Revolution, which featured Hawker as a thirteen year old grubby street boy, but one who becomes a spy for England during the French Revolution and then during the Napoleonic Wars. In *The Forbidden Rose*, Adrian meets his ultimate adversary. She is Justine DeCabrillac, a thirteen year old orphan girl who works for a Madame of a French brothel, but no longer as a whore. At eleven, Justine was forced into prostitution by a man her parents' trusted (Justine's parents were killed). Justine escaped and did what she had to do survive in order to protect her four year old sister, Severine. Justine then meets up with Adrian and his mentor, Doyle (This is all explained in *The Forbidden Rose*, which you must read before *The Black Hawk* so you can understand who Justine and Adrian are). Justine eventually becomes a French Spy who goes by the Owl.

*The Black Hawk* begins twenty-five years after Adrian and Justine first meet. France and England are no longer enemies, all through there's still mistrust on both sides. Justine has come to London and opened her own shop. She's attacked and stabbed with a poisoned knife. The only one she can trust is Hawker. She passes out in a bloody heap on Adrian's front steps and he takes her in and cares for her. Justine may be dying and that's where Adrian thinks back through the decades about his relationship with this daunting and incredible woman he loves.

The story goes back and forth over the years from 1794 France leading up to 1818 London. The moment Adrian meets Justine, he's smitten. Even though they're adversaries who eventually become enemies because of their countries, these two help each other out when they're undercover. Sometimes they don't see each other for months and even years. Their relationship is a difficult one because they never know if they'll be betrayed or killed. Adrian is so loyal to Justine, it will make your chest clench. Justine is a bit more standoffish because of the cards dealt to her in life. She trusts no one, but allows Adrian into her heart. It's a very momentous occasion for both of them when Justine asks Adrian to make love to her. Justine is afraid of intimacy because of how she was raped and abused at such a young age. Adrian realizes this and gives Justine back her innocence through his loving touch. From that moment on they become lovers that spans almost three decades. The moment these two are intimate, they don't stray from one another. They never take another lover, even when they're separated from one another for long periods of time.

Adrian is so easy to like. He's adorable, yet intelligent and sneaky. His devotion for Justine is relentless and unbreakable. He's not afraid to tell Justine how he feels about her. When he and Justine are alone, he wears his heart on his sleeve. His love is enough for the both of them and he never asks her for anything in return. Justine is so stubborn and won't give an inch because she's constantly looking over her shoulder, waiting for someone to take her down. Adrian is the only one who can help her get past the horrors she has endured.

The Black Hawk revolves about two mature people both in the mid to late thirties. Adrian and Justine are old before their time. By the time they're barely in their teens, they've seen so many disturbing acts, including those placed on innocent children. Watching these two drift away from one another and then come together again is incredibly emotional.

Joanna's writing is atmospheric in regards to the setting. You can practically hear Justine's French accent every time she speaks, especially when she calls Adrian 'Awker, not Hakwer. There are a few twists and turns, and how Joanna unveils things, including the person trying to kill Justine makes for a great suspenseful thriller. Joanna's writing is crisp and rich, full of poetically written dialogue and descriptions that has me aching for more.

When a hero like Adrian admits, "there is no one else for me. Never has been," about his Justine, you'll become a pile of swoonage in your seat.

I'm in total awe of Joanna Bourne. It doesn't get any better than this. Adrian and Justine's journey toward their HEA is one that almost brought me to tears. This is a book I want to have babies with. The Black Hawk is one of the best books I read this year by one of the best authors of historical romance of this century.

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### **Megan Winget says**

You think I loved "The Forbidden Rose"?! I love this book so much that I want to start a family with this book. I want to get married and live happily ever after with this book. This book and I are meant for each other. I love this book so much it's depressing. HOW am I going to read other books?!

The story, the plot and writing - fantastic. The characterizations: spot on. Like I said in the Forbidden Rose review, these characters are SPIES. Their emotions are HIDDEN. They don't go around expressing their emotions to pretty much anybody. These characters typically don't even let other people have any clue that they're having emotions at all. Tiny signals. Not broad strokes. God. It's such an intelligent book.

We know Adrian from Forbidden Rose, Spymaster's Lady, and (the much reviled - by me) My Lord and Spymaster. We know him pretty well. We've watched Hawker grow up. We know what he cares about, and what he's good at. We met Justine in the Forbidden Rose, and had a inkling that she's the one who shot him in the Spymaster's Lady (although we don't know why). This book provides flashbacks to those stories, from Adrian and Justine's perspectives. I think that this book is a little different from the others in this series in that the other books are more about groups of people (centering on the British secret service and the French spies who love them) :) - this book really focuses on Hawker and Justine. They've been friends since they were children, they've had a very long, important, and complicated relationship, and they are currently - at the outset of the story - in their late 30s / early 40s (!!!!) (I've read quite a few romances. I've never seen hero/heroine this old. I love it).

I've read a few reviews that say that you can read this book as a standalone. I don't recommend it. I can't know what it would be like, but I think the knowledge of what's going on in the background is a very important part of this book. It's kind of a meta-book. So freaking smart.

Okay, so I'll say what I like about the trilogy.

1. The women are complete badassess. Two of them are spies, and the other, while not technically a spy, is

kind of like the Scarlet Pimpernel. Would you call the Scarlet Pimpernel a spy? She's as good as... They are completely competent in what they choose to do. And they choose to do kind of important things.

2. The characters, both men and women - not one of them - are looking for, or remotely interested in - finding mates (well, maybe Hawker is, in the Black Hawk, but that's after nearly 30 YEARS of relationship with Justine). They happen to find people they find engaging to the point of not being able to ignore them. It's not that the women are disappointed in men, or they haven't found the person they're looking for - they just have other things going on. Saving France. Averting an invasion of England. Fighting the evil that is Robespierre. The men also have lots going on: Saving England. Averting war. Thwarting Napoleon. They don't need to get married. They don't even seem to need to get laid. They might be damaged or not, but they don't take out their damage on the object of their affection. The relationships they form are egalitarian and based on mutual respect.

3. Can I just say that the relationships are SO COOL. These people help each other achieve their goals. They both have goals! And the woman's goal is NOT to encourage the man to become less of a bastard!

4. The writing is fantastic.

-For example: Half of the characters are English / half are French (all of the characters speak both French and English) (and of course, the books are written in English). I might be fooling myself, but I think I can tell when the characters are speaking French and when they're speaking English, because the cadence of the language changes. They idioms that they women, particularly, use, are different. Brilliant.

-Another example: in the Forbidden Rose, right at the beginning Marguerite catches a rabbit to eat. She's starving because the village people have burned down her house (chateau) and she had to flee for her life. I think she's been eating grass and oats for a week?! Anyway, the very brief scene where she decides to set the rabbit free is so beautiful, and gives such an insight into her character. That kind of thing - surprisingly beautiful writing and characterizations - happens again and again throughout these books.

5. The characters don't tend to meet romance stereotypes:

-Beautiful Women: While Justine and Annique are objectively described as beautiful - I don't think anyone else is. Marguerite describes herself as plain, and I don't think it's a romance put-on (you know, "oh! my darn waist-length curly auburn hair! And my waist is so small compared to my hips! So embarrassing! Such a nuisance!") - furthermore, while they might be beautiful, Justine and Annique also often make themselves plain on demand. These are characters who couldn't care less what they look like - unless it's to be less noticeable.

-Handsome men: Maybe Grey is handsome? But I get the distinct impression that Doyle is this huge lumbering bear-like, frightening dude who has a face like a hatchet, but an intellect that can not be stopped. And Hawker? Whip thin, short, gaunt although muscular? I don't think Bourne cares anything about romance conventions. It makes it fun to read.

I saw a review that said that The Black Hawk is the best book of the year. I totally agree. Absolutely. No competition. I also saw a review that said that Bourne is one of the best historical romance writers of the last century. I agree with this as well. However, because her work is so transgressive, I don't know how well her books fit within the historical romance genre. What I'm saying: I think she's a historical romance writer. Given the nature of genre conventions, there's nothing else she could be. However, I don't think her books are very much "like" other books within this genre. This is the sign of a great writer, but it makes for difficult recommendations.

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## **Elena says**

3.5 stars. I have a hard time articulating my thoughts on this one, because it's not really romance novel shaped. Most of the relationship drama occurs in flashback, and the bits in the present of the novel are what

would normally be a crisis and denouement. However, there's a mystery in the present that has a whole arc, with roots in some of the flashback bits but mostly taking place in the present. If that makes any sense whatsoever. So this book didn't read like the typical romance novel, which throws off my ability to make a judgement.

I love Hawker. He was my favorite character in Bourne's previous novels, so I was thrilled to read his story. I liked Justine too. However, for someone who, we are repeatedly told, is an awesome, kickass, independent spy lady, she defers to Hawker way too much. Anytime they're together, he's the one being clever and figuring things out and calling the shots on their course of action, and that was not cool with me. But...it was Hawker, and I *still* love him.

I also, I must confess, hate extended flashbacks. I didn't particularly enjoy *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, largely for that reason. I would probably have loved this book if it had been told in proper chronological order. The resulting novel would have been even less romance novel shaped than this one, since the flashbacks date back to when Justine and Hawker were in their early teens, but there was plenty of spy drama and derring do, which I love.

Overall, I hoped for better than this for Hawker's story, but Joanna Bourne is still one of my favorite romance authors--no one can match her for exciting plot in the realm of historical romance.

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### **Bubu says**

Oh. Wow.

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### **Melanie says**

I reviewed this novel on my [www.bookworm2bookworm.wordpress.com](http://www.bookworm2bookworm.wordpress.com) blog

'The Black Hawk' by Joanna Bourne is a tale that had to be told. I have a feeling that if Ms. Bourne never intended for it, she would have been literally mobbed by every fan of her earlier tales, until she 'put it out there'.

How can I relate to you my emotions while reading this tender love story?! Reading it I felt like Julia Roberts in that scene with Richard Gere where he dolls her all up and takes her to see her first Opera. She is so taken by the performance that she almost leaps out of her seat over the balcony, with her eyes filled with tears and her heart so full of too many emotions to be put to words. She just sat there taking it all in. Absorbing it like a sponge, thinking it unreal, and afraid it would end too soon for her to absorb it ALL!

That's me. That's exactly how I felt reading this tale.

If you've never read a Joanna Bourne novel, then that's what you're missing. You are missing a trip to a time that was not so pleasant, to say the least, in the History of the French as well as the World, yet filled with uncertainty and excitement, but also with love.



Romance for each of us starts at a different time and age, and sometimes we don't even know it until it's way too late. Occasionally, and if we're lucky, we might recognize it and call it love.

For Adrian and Justine that romance started at an age that some would say was too young, unless they knew that these two never had a chance to BE young. Their souls were forced to grow old at an early age. Many years will pass before they realize and admit to each other their love for one another and let their souls finally feel they've come home.

I will not summarize the plot for you, but I will tell you about a boy who grew up without a name (he named himself), isn't even sure how old he is, survives the worst of the slums of London by his intelligence and wits (light fingers, cunning and a skill with a knife notwithstanding).

By providence, he gets recruited by and taken under the protective wing of William Doyle (The Forbidden Rose) to be trained as an English Spy for British Intelligence Service. We, the readers, are fortunate to watch this sprite become a most efficient and ruthless of spies, who ends up Knighted and becomes a Head of BIS.

Adrian and Justine meet for the first time in Doyle and Maggie's story (The Forbidden Rose), and we follow Adrian through two other happily ever after of Annique and Gray (The Spymaster's Lady) and Bastien and Jess (My Lord and Spymaster).

Justine DeCabrillac was eleven years old when her parents were killed and she taken with her two-year old sister by a family 'friend' to a brothel and forced into whoring. From that hell, she is rescued and given home by Madame, a head of the Secret Police in Paris. By the time she meets 'Awker two years later, she's become an employee and a spy for the Secret Police, and is now working for Adrian's enemy.

Even though they worked for the opposite sides, their missions placed them in a close proximity of each other, and they gained respect for one another and became friends. Because of what she went through as a child, Adrian did his best to not even broach her on his feelings for her. If anything was to happen between them, he knew that it would have to be started by Justine.

And after she finally approaches him, 'Awker knows that to make love to her, he would need to 'cleanse' her from the inside out, before he takes her on a journey that will eventually lead them to their destiny.

Adrian Hawkhurst 'Hawker' and Justine DeCabrillac 'Owl' have a mystery to solve, bad guys to catch, and big, life changing decisions to make, and I had a front row seat as I was invited to witness their life as it happened.

Ms. Bourne's prose is legendary by now, but if you're still not convinced at how good she can 'spin a tale' here's just one of many, many favorite parts of mine in this tale.

The scene below is of Justine and Hawker in a room full of people at a fancy ball. They're on a lookout for the enemy, and he is very worried about her as she's not quite healed yet from her knife wound. He kept following her with his eyes, not seeing anyone but her.

"He couldn't touch Owl, except with his eyes, so he let his imagination slide across her, planning where he'd kiss her later tonight. He liked kissing beauty and he'd done a certain amount of that over the years. With Owl, he'd start with beauty and go on to kissing ruthlessness and ideals in the lines at the corners of her eyes. Passion and practicality sitting around her mouth. Not a comfortable woman, his Owl. Not ordinary."

So, my dear bookworm, if you like sweet romance, this book has it in spades. If you prefer intrigue, you won't go wrong with this tale. It is chock full of it. Not convinced yet?! Well, let me put it this way.

Ms. Bourne has wrapped this story in drama, romance, plot, intrigue and sensuality and made it a one-stop-shop so I cried a little, laughed a little but I was never bored, even a little!

Melanie

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## **Mei says**

**Their story started a few years after the reign of terror...when they were just children.. Children grew up too fast. Hammered by life and injustice. By lascivious, powerful men... By greedy governments who exploited children...**

**Owl**

**Hawk**

**Secret lovers since teens...**

**... but became something more during the reign of Napoleon...**

There're a lot of thing to be appreciated here!

**The writing:** strangely compelling, IMHO! Here is an example:

The banyan was embroidered with dragons. ... One lascivious lizard curled all comfy on her left breast, tounge out, as if he were tasting he nipple trough the cloth. The black dragon on the back, had his pointy tail hung down so it was caressing the rounded arse underneath. He (Hawk) didn't let his mind follow that path, however much it tugged at the leash and whined.

**The mutual acceptance of the feeling for each other.** There's no denial. They know that what they're feeling is strong and special. It was really lovely to read!

**The absolute trust in each other and each other's capabilities.** I really appreciated that. Both of them acknowledge that the other is fully capable of taking care of himself and his/her business. That's so rare in a romance novel and here it was just wonderful, considering their profession and its dangers.

If you want a really great spy novel/ historical romance, this is it!

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## **steph says**

[ When Adrian asked Justine to marry him and she didn't say no right away but she didn't say yes because she had never thought about marriage in all her thirty p

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## **Piper says**

Enjoyed it but didn't love it. On to the next in the series.

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## **Karen says**

She was with Hawker, so she was safe. In all the world, there was no flesh, no bone, no sound of breathing she would mistake for Hawker's.

I'll have to admit, my expectations were probably way too high after reading Doyle's book. I was really looking forward to Adrian's story, and I while I really liked it... it didn't blow me away like I'd hoped. With that said though, I am still enjoying the series immensely. I am really looking forward to these last two books.

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## **Jacob Proffitt says**

*This is a bit along in a series (depending on if you go chronologically or by publication date). And you definitely want to read the others first. Adrian features strongly in them all and a large part of the charm of this story is seeing his culmination.*

I'm afraid I'm going to be an outlier on this one because most of my friends who have read this loved it to bits. A lot of that is probably because Adrian is such a strong presence in the other books and it is very gratifying to see him get his girl in the end. And Justine is perfect for him in pretty much every way so on that level, this story is outstanding.

Unfortunately for me, other elements intruded to rain on my enjoyment. A strong component of this series has been the competence porn aspect that has the main characters being very good at spying and scheming and confounding their enemies and delighting their friends. And Adrian and Justine qualify on that score. The thing is, though, that for the main characters to truly shine, they need opposition that doesn't suck. And that was lacking in every way here. Both main foils turn out to be bumbling idiots who succeed only so far as

they don't bother anybody too much. Justine's bad guy is particularly bad as he's nothing more than a pastiche of Snidely Whiplash (only without the mustache. or charm).

Dragging this further for me is how much time they waste. I don't see the devotion to Napoleon that fuels Justine's action through most of her life but her loyalty means that it isn't until he's wiped out that she can even contemplate approaching Adrian. So the whole time they're working things out in the "present" I'm grousing in my head about how they're both almost forty and practically dead. I mean, this *is* 1818 for heaven's sake.

Speaking of which, having Justine brewing "antiseptic" concoctions in 1818 was pretty jarring, I have to tell you. As was Adrian talking about disinfecting a wound. Since germ theory was nearly a half-century away I found that just sloppy.

So anyway, there's great banter and I really liked them both so a solid 3½ stars. But every time I consider rounding up I can't get past that they wasted half their lifetime futzing around because Napoleon was such a great guy...

**A note about Steamy:** There are three explicit sex scenes. I think. I admit I kind of tuned them out after the first. Frankly, I'm wondering what kind of birth control they had seeing as they spent five years as frequent-ish lovers in their youth. Bourne kind of hand-waved that away but it still niggled at me a bit, too. And yeah, I really hated that they separated after being together and in love for so long.

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## Ashley says

I decided to let myself sit on this one for a couple of days before I wrote a review. Sometimes I get swept up in a book and wind up realizing a few hours after the fact that it really wasn't all that amazing. And for all my excitement after reading this one there were still so many niggling issues:

- 1.) Despite the book starting with the heroine being stabbed by a poisoned knife, the first eight chapters or so were pretty dull.
- 2.) On this same note, save for the lovely final scene, the final eight chapters were also pretty boring, and the climax had a Scooby Doo "we would've gotten away with it if it weren't for those meddling kids" vibe to it that was kind of cheesy.
- 3.) It felt like a cop out to me to have the story within the story end when the hero and heroine were 21. It was almost like the author ran out of space but could have easily written flashbacks to Justine and Adrian at other ages if the publisher had given her 200 more pages and another year in which to write them.

But you know what book also has a somewhat slow beginning, a weak ending, and some cheesy elements in the final chapters? *The Shadow and the Star*. And I have reread that book to death and would never dream of giving it less than 5 stars, because I love it. And when I think of *The Black Hawk* I get that same sort of feeling: a feeling that this is my kind of book. There are so many things about it I love.

So even if you had some rough spots, book...

(*This Love Actually* guy is such a fucking creepy character, though, let's be real.)

### **Random Thoughts, some behind spoiler cuts:**

#### **#1**

I don't think a book has made me this emotional since I read *Dragonfly in Amber* back when I was too young to rent a car. The hero and heroine have lost so much time and it honestly was very moving to see them discuss the last 15 years of their lives and share how isolated and lonely they are, even if they never say this to each other explicitly. This sort of talk goes on for a chapter, but it didn't read as emotionally manipulative.

(view spoiler)

#### **#2**

Chapters 19-21 of this book contain some of the most beautiful writing I've ever encountered. Dear lord. I've reread these chapters a few times now already. I know I'll likely come back to them often. I do not say this lightly, but they contain the best love scene I've ever read. Not the sexiest or anything like that, but the most beautiful, emotional one certainly. It was very hot and not filled with bullshit language and euphemisms. Justine and Adrian were both such lonely, wary people who were trying to give each other the best of themselves for just a few hours.

There were two moments before the sex, though, that happened to stick out to me as being especially well done:

(view spoiler)

3.

This book is pointless if you haven't read at least books 1 and 3 in the Spymaster series. Yes, technically this series can be read out of order, but there is a ton that will go right over your head and make this story much more of a "so what who cares?" novel if you haven't already read the others.

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## Caz says

**I've given this an A for narration and A+ for content at All About Romance.**

In All About Romance's review of **The Black Hawk** in November 2011, Jean Wan wrote,

"Once in a while, during every reader's literary life, you encounter a book that reminds you why you are a reader. It renews your faith, if faith was lost; it rekindles your interest, if interest waned; and every word, every page, is a wonder. Adrian and Justine's story is not only such a book and it confirms Joanna Bourne is one of the best authors currently writing."

That still holds true. This is a truly exceptional story that has been enhanced by an equally exceptional performance from Kirsten Potter in this new audiobook version.

England's war with Napoleon has been over for three years, and former French spy Justine de Cabrillac has settled in London where she makes her living as a shopkeeper. But old habits die hard, and when Justine comes into possession of valuable information concerning a plot against the British Intelligence service, she knows there is only one man she can turn to: her former friend, former lover, and former enemy Adrian Hawker, now Sir Adrian Hawkhurst and Head of British Intelligence. On her way to headquarters, Justine is attacked and seriously wounded, reaching her destination by sheer force of will alone. As Justine fights for her life, Adrian and his team of agents sets about investigating the whys and wherefores of the attempt on her life – and discover a plot that goes far further than any of them have anticipated. Someone is out to discredit Adrian and see him tried for murder, and that someone will go to any lengths to achieve these aims.

The stage is set for an engrossing story of revenge and espionage, and I really can't say much more about the plot without spoilers; all I'll say is that it's satisfyingly complex, detailed and expertly rendered. Anyone who has read or listened to any of the other books in this series will know that Joanna Bourne is a superb storyteller whose knowledge of the period seeps through in every sentence. She never loses sight of the fact that her characters are just as important as the twists and turns of the plot.

The search for Justine's would-be-murderer finds her and Adrian working together once more to unravel a knot of truths that goes back more than two decades – and interweaving through that plotline is a love story that spans the same period, a story that has been briefly glimpsed in the other books in the series (Adrian and Justine met as teenagers in *The Forbidden Rose*). *The Black Hawk* is unlike the other books in the series, which all tell their stories in a straightforward, linear way. Here, we jump backwards and forwards to different points in Adrian's and Justine's pasts, seeing their very first joint operation as teens and then finally discovering why, when we met Adrian as a gangly twenty-something in *The Spymaster's Lady*, he was suffering from a near-fatal bullet wound inflicted by Justine.

I've thoroughly enjoyed each of the books in this series in both print and audio formats, but I think this is my favourite of them all. Adrian has been a strong presence in the other stories, and he makes for an absolutely wonderful hero: highly intelligent, authoritative, ruthless – and sexy as hell. As has been apparent from the moment they met, Justine is his perfect match in every way. She's just as intelligent and ruthless, and over the years they have come to know each other as nobody else ever has or will. They're a couple that is truly meant-to-be, despite all the obstacles they have had to overcome, or perhaps because of them. The romance between them is full of insight, tenderness and sensuality and I love the way it unfolds in flashback.

Kirsten Potter delivers another absolutely wonderful performance in this audiobook. Her narration is well-paced and expressive, and all the characters are easily identifiable and appropriately voiced. The standout performance is that of the Black Hawk himself. She portrays him as a teenager, a young man, and as Sir Adrian, a mature man in his late thirties who has lost none of his childhood insouciance or tendency to circumvent authority when it suits him. Her interpretation of Justine, too, is spot on. Ms. Potter has a wonderful way with Ms. Bourne's French heroines, not just in her expert use of accent, but in the way she conveys their courage and pragmatism. There are times I can actually hear the Gallic shrug in her voice! While the story is quite dark at times, it's not without humour, most of it coming from the deadpan utterances of the protagonists, rendered brilliantly by Ms. Potter. The characters we have met in previous books are portrayed consistently, and other than the odd mispronunciation and antipodean twang in Ms Potter's English accent, there is absolutely nothing about her narration that doesn't work.

**The Black Hawk** is a wonderful audio experience from beginning to end and I can't recommend it highly enough.

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### **Felicia says**

I mean, I really like this author's writing style in everything she does. It's vaguely flowery and antiquated, so be warned I like that and it makes some people furious, so it might not be for you. It makes the book feel more "significant" than others in the genre, more *Outlander* light than frothy stuff. ANYWAY I enjoyed this book, but I think there was some tension lost in the plot construction. I mean, there was no tension because you pretty much knew the two were DEFINITELY gonna get together, they're together in the first chapter pretty much (except she's dying, except you know she won't die because that's the genre, right?). The flashback style of the long history of the characters was kind of beautiful and the ending was made more poignant for the long years they'd been kept apart, but the inevitability of their union lacked tension, and I didn't REALLY care about the peril story as much as the characters, which were well-drawn as usual. I dunno, still a very good read, but the first in this series is hard to top, being one of my fave Historical romance novels out there :) This author remains on my read list for sure!

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