



Midsummer Magic

Catherine Coulter

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Philip Hawksbury, the Earl of Rothermere, obeying his father's dying wish, hies himself to Scotland to offer for one of the daughters of Alexander Kilbracken, the Earl of Ruthven.

Frances Kilbracken, informed of the earl's arrival and his mission, disguises herself as a bespectacled dowd so she won't be the one selected by the young earl. But choose her he does, and for all the wrong reasons.

The newly married couple return to England, together but not at all happy. Philip dumps Frances at Desborough Hall, his ancestral estate, and heads back to his old life in London. Ah, but Desborough has a stud farm and racing stable, and Frances is magic with horses.

When the earl returns to his home, driven by guilt, he discovers the woman he married has grossly deceived him. What follows is a battle of the sexes that will have you chuckling, maybe even howling with laughter...

Midsummer Magic Details

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Author : Catherine Coulter

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From Reader Review *Midsummer Magic* for online ebook

Cyndy Aleo says

I've inherited bags and boxes of quickie beach read novels from my mother and sister that I'm in the process of going through and releasing via Bookcrossing.com. In one of these piles I found Catherine Coulter's *Midsummer Magic*, originally published in 1987 as part of her "Magic Trilogy."

::: Bodices Ripping Right and Left :::

Philip Hawskbury was the second son, and expected a carefree life in the military. After his older brother's death, however, he inherited the title Earl of Rothermere as well as his father's promise to a Scotsman who'd saved his life. When his father appears to be about to take his last breath, Hawk promises to travel to Scotland to marry one of the daughters of the man who saved his father's life. Once there, he finds two beautiful girls (Clare and Viola) and the homely, frumpy Frances. Frances has actually disguised herself in hopes that Hawk won't choose her, but Hawk decides that an unattractive wife who doesn't require much socially is perfect; he can dump her off at his country estate and go back to his life in society and with his mistress.

Hawk dutifully tries to impregnate Frances before he returns to London, but once there, is instructed by his mistress that he should make love to his wife just like a mistress. When Hawk heads back to his country home, he finds out that his wife is actually intelligent and beautiful, and has set out to restore the horse racing and breeding program (with some help from Hawk's scheming father) that his older brother had going at the estate before his death. Along the way, Hawk discovers that he loves his wife, and also that things with the horses and his brother might not have been exactly what they seem.

::: Giving a Bad Name to Romances :::

Midsummer Magic is a prime example of why so many people look down on the romance genre as a whole, and could serve as a textbook for what NOT to do in a romance novel. It follows the formula for introducing the hero and heroine and starting them out at odds with each other, but it goes SO far past that to prove a point that it's actually nauseating. Who on earth would want to read love scenes that are about as romantic as an artificial insemination for livestock? And then to go father, after Hawk has essentially raped his wife repeatedly, he dresses her as a boy and has her come down to the stables to watch them breed horses to get her in the mood. How ROMANTIC!

The character of Hawk is so dense that you want to slap him even realizing that this is a period romance, and the attitudes of men toward their wives were probably pretty much like this. The fact that he is so dense as to think that wives didn't require or deserve the same care and concern during lovemaking that mistresses is beyond ignorant, and the reader hopes against hope that there is actually another strapping young man who will ride in and sweep Frances off her feet before this Neanderthal swings his figurative club again.

I like reading a good romance novel, especially in the summer when it's too hot to think, but this one had me so annoyed it couldn't even serve its purpose as a poolside trifle.

This review previously published on Epinions: http://www.epinions.com/review/_20004...

Michelle says

oh freakin my.

I tried to push aside my feminism thoughts with this book. While I still think how he treated her was beyond wrong, I had to keep in mind the time period this book was written. However, I did skip over a few of the scenes (ok more than a few because there are wayyyy too many) because I was very uncomfortable.

So I knew this wasn't going to be a 5 star book, but the characters progressively got worse and by the end, I couldn't care less what happened to the characters.

Nasty Lady MJ says

To see review with gif click [here](#).

This is probably the worst romance novel I ever read. Or at least the most memorably bad one. It was originally published in 1981 which explains some of this horribleness since the book is full of the things that the 70's and 80's era of romance novels are full of-women being subjected to horrible abuse and alpha douche heros.

I really don't like calling them heros. In fact, I'm going to be referring to the so called hero (Phillip) as a rapist because that is fucking what he is. A fucking rapist and abuser.

While I discuss what's wrong with this book-fucking everything-I am going to occasionally mention some changes that should've been made to it.

Before I do that though, I'll talk about how I originally found this turd of a book. It was in my mom's stash of goodies. It's funny that my mom actually bought this sort of shit. She's a tough cookie and has always been one to tell me to tell a misogynist idiot to fuck off. And trust me, there are a lot of misogynist jerks out there, one is even running for president. Anyway, to get back on topic this book is a lot of misogyny and then some. I haven't talked to her about it, because when I first read it I wasn't supposed to be reading it being her impressionable teenage daughter. Now, I doubt she'd even realize what book I was referring to since her reading these days tends to focus on gardening books and books about Pembroke Welsh Corgis.

Problem 1: Frances

I felt sympathy for the main character throughout the book but that doesn't mean I like her. For one thing her plan dressing like a complete frump is completely stupid and sort of pointless, especially since she is playing Peeping Tom on her husband. And as fearless and tenacious as this MC is described, it shocks me that she did not even attempt to fight back or runaway.

You know what I would've liked well I'm going to tell you I wanted Coulter to fucking write that Frances leaves the Rapist. Why can't there be one of these fucking books where the heroine leaves an abusive relationship? Is it too much to ask? Again, I know this book is in the 80's, but still. Frances didn't deserve to be with the Rapist even though she was completely stupid and sort of creepy herself.

Problem 2: The Rapist

Fuck off.

Fuck off.

Fuck off.

Fuck off.

Fuck off.

I could just repeat that phrase and it would not be near enough times how many times I wanted to tell the Rapist (Phillip/Hawk) this. Frances is plain creepy, but Phillip is just disgusting and needs to be castrated.

He feels like he has every right to have sex with Frances anytime he wants. He doesn't give a crap what she feels. He justifies the fact that he is forcing her to have sex with him because he uses cream so that it won't be too rough on her-spoiler alert, we're subjected to one scene where he forgets to use said cream and the results end up being disgustingly graphic.

Long story short, cream or no cream-and I feel mildly disgusting saying that-rape is rape. It's sad when the only remotely decent love scene is with his fucking mistress.

Yes, he has a fucking mistress AFTER he married the heroine and she gives him love advice.

Oh, fuck me.

See anytime I start talking about this fucking rapist, my vocabulary converts into Gordon Ramsay vocabulary since the only word I want to say is FUCK after reading this drivel.

If I was Coulter I would've killed the Rapist off when he was having sex with his mistress perhaps he gets shot by the mistress herself or maybe by one of her lovers, or I'd have Frances's father wake up to what sort of scum he sold his daughter off too for all that money and realizes-hey, I fucked up. Someone though need to shut that mother fucking rapist up.

Again, fuck this guy. Coulter, you can do better.

Problem 3: The Plot

It was just fucking stupid.

So, Frances disguises herself as a frump so that the Rapist will ignore her. Obviously, it doesn't work but their not married right then and there. Why doesn't she show her real self there? Would've taken care of the fucking problem. Or run the fuck away.

Again, this character has no fucking sense of self preservation. This problem stays throughout the rest of the novel where Frances had opportunities to get away from the rapist and doesn't do anything. Yes, she ditches the frump look but she sits there waiting for the Rapist to come back rather than stealing one of his horses and running off. Again, this could've been great if she would've escaped and found a non-jerky guy and then

wanted to marry him but couldn't because of the Rapist.

God.

And the whole thing why they get married....because of the Rapist's near dead daddy who ends up being the picture of health and faking the whole thing to get the Rapist married.

??????????

I get that medicine was sort of piss poor back then, but surely you'd realize that someone who is the picture of health isn't exactly on his death bed.

Le sigh.

And the fact that the marquess acts like he pulled a prank on his rapist's son and that he should be happy that he married a girl he didn't even want makes the book even more painful to read.

By the way, the book is pitched as a comedy. It's not. Honestly, I only think sadists share Coulter's humor but I'm digressing...

Back to the plot, so we have two idiots who didn't want to get married-one who should've had some sense of self preservation and the other who should've gotten shot, hang, quartered, or something awful should've happened to him are sort of thrown together. The Rapist leaves for a bit, but like I said got some advice from his mistress and decides that maybe if he takes all of Frances's clothes off when he rapes puts cream (and no, I'm not going to make a joke about the cream, but let's just say I got some nasty imagery my head) and promptly forces breeds with her (and yes, the word breed is used frequently) she'll look hot.

But Gosh darn it, she looks hot with clothes on since she ditched those nasty glasses and ugly cap and gown. Oh, yeah, and now she apparently has a rack on her that he didn't notice.

He of courses gets mad that she kept her so called hotness from him and promptly rapes her again, but somehow Frances is eventually turned on by all this crap and there's some weird shit with the horses where the audience has to painfully read about and then I think there's a random bad guy at the end.

Honestly, by the fourth or fifth rape, I just started to tune out when I reread the thing so that I could write about the worst romance novel I ever read I only made it to the 60% mark before all the weird horse sex started.

It's not a very well put together book, folks.

Obsidian says

Trigger warning: Rape

The only thing that this book had going for it, was that it kept making me think of the Jem and the Holograms song, "Midsummer Madness."

I maybe played that song a lot while reading this book on Saturday. I needed some happy heading my way.

Think of this book as the reverse "She's All That." Heroine is actually hot and smart young woman (Frances) who doesn't want to marry the hero (Phillip). Hero marries her anyway though because he thinks she's ugly so he can do what he wants and just ignore her. No, I am not kidding about that. He's also a jerk of the first order and when he realizes his wife is hot decides he is going to bend her to his will and make her want to have sex with him. I don't know people, I didn't write this. I may have screamed into a pillow for a second or two though while finishing this book up.

Frances Kilbracken is the daughter of the Earl of Ruthven. Frances father and Phillip's father (the Earl of Rothermere) obeys his father's dying wish to run off and marry one of the Earl's daughters. Phillip chooses Frances because one of the daughters is too attractive, I can't remember why the second one sucked, and then Frances who disguises herself and acts as if she can't read seems like the better wife for Phillip. Phillip has a mistress and has no intention of giving her up to a wife. So having a wife he can keep under his thumb sounds like the best arrangement.

I can see why Frances doesn't want to marry Phillip. I was actually glad she was smart and knew a ton of things about horses. I really wish though that she had gotten the upper hand with Phillip more though. In the end, because Frances likes sex, she just gets cowed by her husband. Once again, I didn't write this. I repeat I didn't write this.

Phillip is typical romance hero of the times. He is a jerk and also thinks no means yes. So yes dear readers, we got a rape scene. Nothing to recommend about Phillip. Though he does use cream when he rapes her which I think is Coulter's way of saying hey he's not super terrible since he used something to ease his way inside his wife while he rapes her. I am going to keep saying that because good lord I can't with this book. He speaks graphically to Frances about sex though after he realizes she's hot. He decides he is going to have his "rights" and is angry about Frances not acting like a typical female. And one wonders what would have happened if Phillip hadn't realized that Frances was not really unattractive? I guess his behavior would have been okay and yeah to the mistress?

There are side characters in this one and I did enjoy Phillip's father a lot. Also Frances's father. They appear to not be heartless men. Phillip's mistress? No. There is a freaking scene with Frances and the mistress attacking Phillip and I think it was supposed to be funny? I don't know. I didn't laugh. Maybe my funny bone doesn't exist anymore.

Philip's sister is apparently having relations to a dude she's not married to, and I wondered at no one blinking an eye about this in the time and day this book was taking place. It was weird it occurs and that Phillip used this as a reason to talk dirty to Frances. Yes that really did happen. I may have had some wine to stop thinking about this scene.

The writing is okay and the plot is straight forward. After reading "The Nightingale Legacy" it was nice to read a book that wasn't so confusing.

The ending was a well I guess things are alright even though some of these people are awful. I am so donating all of my romance reads to the library this weekend.

Sue says

3.5, it was good....but the ending was rushed...as you can guess by the title a bit of a taming of the shrew theme.

Rachel says

It's time for another Ragereview. These come up periodically, and when I reduce poor Matt to giggles over my reenactments, I start to think that maybe I'm funny and should write these things down for the rest of the world.

This particular book is *Midsummer Magic*, by Catherine Coulter. Now, you might say, *dear Rachel*, this is a romance novel. Are you feeling a touch masochistic today?

I have an excuse, I promise. It's not a very good one, to be sure, but it is an excuse. I can't find the review now, but it was gushingly positive over the book, claiming that the roots of the story could be found in the story of Sir Gawain's wife and *The Wife of Bath*. There was only one real point of similarity in the stories, which I'll have to expound on further.

But before I get to that: a disclaimer. I'm writing a ragereview of a *romance* novel. If your answer to the question, "Do I have delicate sensibilities?" is anything less than raucous laughter, you may want to avoid reading after the cut. But don't worry, I have pre-cut rage, too! Just with less salty language and fewer illustrations.

A brief backstory is given to us: Hawk's father had his life saved by a Scotsman, and in gratitude, swore that one of his sons would marry one of the Scotsman's daughters, to not only give her a better life, but also to give the other two sisters a chance at a London Season and wealthy, titled husbands. Just what every Regency-era father dreams of, right?

Now, Hawk objects. Of *course* he does, else this wouldn't be a romance novel. But, his father is dying, tragically and melodramatically, and only wants to see his one living son wed before he dies. His father is also a manipulative tool. One guess as to how ill the man actually is. Just one. Hawk, guilt-ridden, goes up to Scotland, to meet the three choices. He'd really rather gad about London with his mistress, and worries that marriage is going to upset his carefree plans.

Meanwhile, Lord Kilbracken is announcing to his three daughters that *One of them is getting married this week! Be happy, dammit!* The eldest, a caricature of an artist, wanders dreamily in hope he'll choose her so she can paint all the *Ton*. The youngest, a silly, vivacious, and pretty girl would give anything for a rich husband to shower her with gifts and take her absolutely everywhere so she can be Seen About.

The middle daughter, (whose name I have forgotten already because she's *that* kind of heroine) Frances (ah-ha!) is enraged by this news, much as I am by the way the point-of-view changes in the midst of paragraphs *repeatedly*. It goes beyond simple error or an editing oversight and could almost be called a stylistic choice, it happens with such frequency. I became surprised that the author didn't suddenly begin switching POV in the middle of a sentence!

Frances is the prettiest daughter, known for her beauty and sparkling wit (I never did witness wit- merely snarky, unfunny bitchiness), and a great lover of animals. She spends her days on their country estate being a veterinarian of sorts, caring for the horses in particular. She treats colic, delivers foals and calves, stitches wounds, and doses thrush. She's A Very Independent Woman. (Because heaven knows, in any book set before 1950, you must indicate a woman is Modern by having her heal things. Did they never want to run a shop, or dream of being a lawyer, or of managing their own estate? And God forbid a heroine be remotely interested in anything *domestic*.) As Hawk arrives, Frances spies him bathing in the loch, and ogles him until she figures out that this is the man she meant to Hate Forever. Then she's angry at him for daring to bathe where she might see. She has delicate sensibilities, ya'll! Men bathing in what they thought was privacy is just beyond the pale!

But, loyal readers, never fear! Our intrepid heroine has just the plan to deceive the dashing yet dastardly dude!

In a fit of conceit, she chooses to encourage Hawk to pick one of her eager sisters by: wearing her oldest clothes, pulling her beautiful flowing hair into a bun, wearing spectacles that inhibit her vision, and being boring. Because she's actually concerned that he'll decide on her if he sees how Totally Awesome she is. Now, to her slight credit, she realizes it's incredibly egotistic of her... but, despite her vaunted brains, she never once considers the possibility of just asking him to not think of her as an option. Rather than be sensible, she chooses an idiotic disguise. Honestly, the only time things like that work are in movies and books where they're *scripted* to, because people are *not that stupid*.

(What was her name again? Oh, right...) Frances' father, stepmother, and sisters are horrified at the hideous hag into which she's transformed herself. And seriously, the word *hag* is tossed around like a football. She's a 22-year-old hottie in a shapeless dress and a bun, not Baba Yaga. And despite parental objections, she minces about like an aged mouse, much to the delight of her sisters who are relieved that their competition has just been reduced.

Hawk is *appalled* by her wretched state. The bun and hat and glasses are near enough to make his stomach turn in revulsion. This visceral reaction to a woman's appearance- a woman who is actually exceptionally gorgeous- really does nothing to make him seem like a sympathetic person. Incredibly boring hijinks ensue, wherein Hawk has a personal interview with each sister and Frances sulks. No one bothers to tell Hawk that Frances is being a manipulative twit (even her disapproving father), and so he's stuck with a decision.

Since she's made herself into a revolting wretch, the author needs to come up with *some* reason for Hawk to pick Frances, so he has a soul-searching session wherein he realizes he's a selfish, immature git who doesn't want to give up his mistress and carefree life. But rather than thinking this is in any way bad, he instead concludes that the only reasonable response is to marry the ugly sister not interested in meeting anyone. So he can leave her at home, alone. And she won't mind at all that he's out whoring, because she's ugly!

Any pretense at respect for this man I had was lost *right there*.

So, they get a quickie wedding, Frances whines and moans and complains and shrieks, and they leave for Hawk's estates directly thereafter, and this is where the cut should probably go... before I get to the wedding night.

(cut was here on blog!)

Hawk thinks, in his ever-so-winning manner, that his best bet at a happy life is to get his frumpy bride knocked up post-haste. The first night Frances makes some excuse that doesn't even matter because it's so lame that I can't even remember, and then after a long trip in the carriage the next day she's seriously motion-sick. Pleading headache, she pushes Hawk off another night, but he's convinced she's lying and accosts her in her room... to find her puking up her guts because this ever-so-intelligent woman took colic medicine by mistake, instead of the laudanum she'd meant to take.

He holds her hair while she's sick, never once noticing any difference with her hair down and without glasses. Of course, she is being repeatedly and violently sick, so he has some excuse. The next night, though, he is determined to exercise his husbandly rights. So determined, in fact, that he completely ignores all her protests.

WHAT.

Okay, to distract from that first instance of complete horror, let's take a detour into something funnier and less... rape. Because that shit ain't funny.

This is a girl who grew up in rural Scotland, working with farm animals. She's afraid of sex on the grounds that: she doesn't know what to expect, he'll be so big that he'll literally *tear her apart*, and good girls don't like sex, even with their husbands. So, after her protests go unheeded, she lies still and thinks of England.

He, on the other hand- or perhaps on the same hand as Frances' last objection (which she never voices), has decided that wives are entirely unlike mistresses and require no encouragement in the marital relations department. So, rather than trying his hand at making any part of the night easier or better for her, he gets out cream to ease his passage.

I had a bit of mental disconnect at the idea of cream. While I was well aware that what was *meant* was something along the lines of a Regency KY, I couldn't help picturing something a bit more like the heavy whipping cream I'd just picked up at the Jewel a few days before.

And... well. Let me just say that whipping cream doesn't seem like the best idea for that kind of thing. It's a bit sticky. Not to mention to constant repetition of the word "cream" was enough to make me burst into immature giggle fits. I've (much to my chagrin) read many romance novels, in order to have the right to criticize them to my little heart's content. For those who've spared themselves the pain, I now have the pleasure of informing you that "cream" is the go-to word to describe feminine arousal fluids. You're welcome. Your brain will forever link that to the half-and-half you're about to pour in your coffee.

Feel free to hate me. Sometimes I do, too.

These forced relations with the aid of oft-mentioned cream continue at every inn on the way back to Hawk's estates, and I cringed every time. At least I can be sure they weren't meant to be romantic, but way to paint your hero in a sympathetic light. He's willing to force himself on his wife, even when she's lying there, crying. Asshole. He doesn't even talk to her. Just enters with the cream, does his business, and is out the door in ten minutes. Nothing about this makes him sexy.

Then, eventually, *thankfully*, they get back to his home, where his father is (unsurprisingly) spry and running about, bossing the servants and acting in a way that's supposed to be Funny Old Wise Man Who Knows Everything but is in fact merely irritating, bossy, and an interfering know-it-all. There is much outrage expressed over his Lying Lies, but Hawk's father is incredibly smug over Hawk having picked the right girl, despite Hawk's complete incredulity that his father *wanted* him to pick the heinous hag.

Their first night at home, he forgets the cream, and this leads to his father being informed by the servants of the state of their sheets. His father then confronts Hawk, demanding to know if they'd waited until returning to their home before consummating the marriage. That's right- Hawk forgot the cream, and rather than trying *anything at all* in order to prevent his wife from suffering, had sex with her without any lubrication at all, leaving bloody spots on the sheets because of his utter lack of compassion.

No wonder she hates him.

A few of Hawk's friends stop by to meet Frances, and all of them see through the ludicrous disguise that has somehow survived several weeks, and yet again, no one mentions it to Hawk. This is either commentary on the depth of his friendships, or perhaps his friends simply feel he deserves to be hoodwinked at such a pathetic level.

It's a matter of weeks before Hawk gets fed up and goes traipsing back to London, whining to his mistress that his wife is *boring*. She tries to convince him, between vigorous bouts of sex, that wives are just like any other women, and that he should treat Frances like he does his ladies of the night. He runs briefly into his shrewish sister and her Clearly Evil Fiance-

(mid-paragraph POV change to hear him talk about his Evil Plots!). Hawk is flirted with by disappointed women, gambles with his male friends, and is finally guilted into returning home to his wife.

Frances, on the other hand, has been encouraged by her father-in-law to ditch the disguise and run the estate, since Hawk seems to show no interest in doing so. She's incredibly gorgeous, making friends with all the staff immediately, and shows an enthusiastic interest in the racing stables. Her skill at healing farm animals gives her a wicked insight into the business of horse racing, of course.

Hawk returns, and finds his wife, sans bun, spectacles, silly hat, and shapeless dress, and is hit with a lightning bolt of lust, followed swiftly by jealousy as he decides that she's been cuckolding him with his employees. *Obviously*. Finally her denials get through to his little brain, and he decides that it's a good thing he came back intending to seduce her. Why wouldn't he seduce a hottie? He's also irritated that the little lady is overstepping her bounds by running the stables. He doesn't bother to look at her lack of qualifications, he

just thinks with his penis and decides that since he's having sex with her, she shouldn't be doing such unladylike work.

But Frances is still opposed to knowing her husband biblically. Given the experience she's had thus far, I can't really blame her, but again, she doesn't go about expressing this to him in any useful way. He walks up with a smarmy look on his face and she scowls and walks away. No, "Hey, don't be a douche." Nothing resembling, "Have you considered listening to me." Just screeching over how she hates him and he's horrible and stupid and on and on and on.

So, upon hearing that she's hired out a stallion for stud services, he decides to have her join the men and watch the horses mating. Because that will get her totally turned on and ready to go! Hawk forces her to dress as a boy, which amazingly fools everyone, and much to my surprise, Hawk's idiotic plan worked.

The author describes the horses mating in rather painful detail, talking about the mare screaming in pleasure, and the stallion trumpeting his release, with a pause to describe- with a failed attempt at gentility- the stallion's genitalia. And Frances is driven so wild that she and Hawk step into the barn for a quickie. And somehow, despite working as a healer for farm animals, Frances has somehow missed figuring out how animals mate. Here's a hint- this (which you shouldn't click on unless you're fully prepared to take responsibility for witnessing horse sex):

Is Not Sexy.

Unless you're a furry, in which case, I don't want to know, thanks.

Yes. Well. In any case, Frances pretty thoroughly hates herself for being so into Hawk after watching... that... and avoids him for a day or two. His plans to woo her into sexytimes failed, Hawk then asks her to sit down with him after dinner and play cards, whereupon he gets her blindingly drunk and they have hot, hot monkey sex. Which she regrets in the morning, so he plans to get her drunk again.

Unfortunately, his dastardly plans are foiled by a visit from his Shrewish Sister and her Still Clearly Evil Fiance, who want to buy the racing stables from poor Hawk, who doesn't want that trouble, does he? Oh, no! Hawk and Frances refuse to sell, on the grounds that Hawk wants to keep taking his wife to see horses getting it on so that he can get some, and Clearly Evil Fiance flounces off with Sister, back to London to plot more.

And then accidents begin to happen, and Frances falls off a horse after a booby-trapped jump. Hawk is distraught, because he loves his wife. One might wonder when this happened. Also *how*. These questions are mere trivialities, since they have more sex. Also, she loves him, too. Because of sex that she either didn't consent to or regretted. Stockholm Syndrome is *romantic!*

Then about two chapters wherein the Clearly Evil Fiance shows his true colors and they find out the secret of the stable which was stunning clear from the beginning. Flying in to save the day is... Hawk's mistress, who he'd given a huge pile of money and sent away to get married after she funneled information about CEF to him. Frances and the mistress become instant and fast friends. For some reason. The bad guy offs himself, all comes to light, and everyone lives happily ever after, the end.

...no, really. The end. Plot only happened in the final 10% of the novel.

graveyardgremlin (formerly faeriemyst) says

After a fairly good start (about the first 80 pages or so), I was hooked and was enjoying the book, then it went downhill and I finally stopped on page 218. Be warned, there is what could be considered (in our times at least) rape. However, it was a husband's duty to get his wife with heir; and I do get it, but that doesn't mean I want to read about it in a romance...repeatedly. I believe I could have gotten over the first 'rape,' but then it happened again, and again, and most likely again but I stopped before what might have been. Enough already!

I ended up hating both the so-called heroine and hero, they just were not sympathetic, interesting, or anything other than horrible. Frances started fights, cowers, and snivels all the time, and frankly, she should have known she needed to fulfill her "wifely duty" to get with heir. Now I am not in any way saying rape is right, but back then she should have known what was going to happen, and all she does is act belligerent and righteous about it and wants to be left alone (Ha!). Then there's Hawk (ugh!), who is detestable, shows no remorse, and the author actually writes about him with his mistress! What is Ms. Coulter smoking? I can't even fathom them going from hate to love (and I do mean hate!), which apparently doesn't happen according to other Amazon reviewers.

The author says the book "is just dandy the way it is," but it totally is not. She goes on to say that we'll chuckle and may even howl with laughter because of the battle of the sexes.... Now I don't know about that because I couldn't get past how totally unlikable Hawk and Frances were, among the other things mentioned, so who knows? And frankly, I don't care to know. This book needed many rewrites and I do not recommend it at all! I wish I listened to the reviews and stayed away, but no, I had to stick with it. What can I say, I'm stubborn. To be honest I thought there was only one rape scene in the book and didn't know there were more, but I usually only skim them so I don't read any spoilers. I am so sorry I read so much of this when I could have been enjoying a much better book. I really don't think I'll ever pick up another book from Ms. Coulter if her other books are like this.

Inga says

No No No. I don't know why this book is considered so highly by Smart Bitches Trashy Books. It is extremely outdated and even circa the Victorian era, marital rape was a no no no. Read how much the heroine loved it. NOT. It's a witty book, that's true, but the era of raping your wife into loving you in romance literature is over for good thank heavens.

Paxnirvana says

Wow. This was crap.

I thought Coulter was a better author than this. (must be an early one? eh. Too lazy to check.)

The POV switches inside paragraphs got old fast. The utter shallowness of the Hero's reaction to the Heroine's disguise trick was almost enough to make me pitch the book right off. The supposedly hilarious

'battle of the sexes' consisted of name-calling, fleeing to other towns and knee-jerk dictatorial behavior. Lamé.

The mystery was awkward and seemed like a last-minute way to finish off a story that was going nowhere the author seemed to enjoy.

There was one hawt sex scene though. *Smoking hot*. But that's not enough to make the rest of this drivel worth wading through. And so sorry, Ms Coulter, but *no one* does the awkwardness and repression and duty of sex between arranged marriage partners better (or hotter) than Mary Balogh.

I'm starting to wonder if it's me or the average romance reader with the problem here. (Smart Bitches... you failed me again.) This was strongly recommended as a fun read. But it was just bad. So why does it seem that well-written, enjoyable stories and romance are becoming mutually exclusive? *big sigh*

Naksed says

A rather juvenile but humorous set-up bringing two reluctant people into a marriage of convenience. The beautiful wife disguises herself like an ugly duckling by donning unattractive garb and a pair of thick glasses. Rather reminded me of Hollywood romantic comedies where the nerd girl only has to switch to contact lenses and get a blow out to become a femme fatale.

There were funny lines and entertaining banter as these two butt heads but it grew to be tedious overtime. The involvement of a mistress with a heart of gold, which the hero thinks and talks about wistfully to the very last page of the novel, in AND out of bed with his wife, certainly went against the cliché of the catty other woman, but she was just too involved with the story.

There never was any romance or love between the characters, who seemed to dislike each other to the bitter end. The only times they clicked was in bed and that was only after the husband realised his wife's disguise. Before that, he treated her quite ruthlessly like a broodmare in disturbingly graphic scenes that made me quite sad as they rang very true of what a woman's experience would be in the marital bed in that era (and quite frankly remains the case with many women even in this era). There never was remorse, much less grovel, for the very horrible way he treated her before realizing she was attractive nor any indication that he loved anything about her but her body. To the bitter end, he calls her a shrew and feels he has been snared unwillingly into a matrimonial trap. Basically, he admits to himself he is in love but he is certainly not elated about it and quite resentful of her. He honestly did seem a lot happier when he was free to be with his mistress and flirt with aristo ladies at his leisure. Not my kinda romance.

The last part of the book deals with a very boring horse mystery that results in an unintentionally comical standoff with a bunch of bad guys. I could not care less by that point.

Sue says

When all was said and done, I just could not get past the fact that the hero in this story was tall, dark,

handsome, and a superficial ass. If you can buy the idea that glasses and a bad hair day will disguise great beauty, and if you can still fantasize about a man that these things will make a difference to, then buy this book. Otherwise, keep looking.

KatieV says

Don't think I'll be reading any more Coulter books. She's not a bad writer and there were things I liked about this book. I did get some giggles in the beginning when the heroine was pretending to be ugly. But... there's always something really weird or disturbing IMHO. Thank heavens there was no gang rape in this one, but the marital rape was disturbing and I'm a fan of the bodice ripper. Also, the awkward sex in the beginning was just... blech. What is it with Coulter and her hero's obsession with 'cream'? It's like they can do any douche-y thing they want as long as they use their magical cream. Also weird - the thing with his mistress encouraging him to woo his wife. *shakes head*

I'm giving it a 3 since I did finish it.

Raquel says

3.5

Jennifer says

I picked up this book because the Smart Bitches Who Read Trashy Novels love it (or at least one of them does). I was really excited to get it, but I was disappointed in the end. I guess I had really high hopes for it given their review and it was only fine. One thing I did find interesting was how Coulter approached the difficulty of sex between a husband and wife when neither of them want it. It gave me a new appreciation for women in an arranged marriage.

Kajol says

DN-to the fucking-F.

This book trashed all my illusions about the "wonderful plot" cast by a dozen other reviews, that I in my unsuspecting innocence, read and believed until I finally read this novel for myself. Let me just state that this is a disgusting piece of superficial and artlessly written crap I lament reading.

I came to absolutely *hate* the hero- Phillip Hawksbury, the Earl of Rothermere- soon as I discovered how cold-hearted and selfish he could be. He was a total insensitive ass- the way he performed his supposedly "duties" to get a heir. I would tag it as rape, but the heroine participated, so I guess that makes the author stand in clear. He was shallow and a douchebag. His judgement of Frances was based on her looks (even though she did act like a total idiot herself, but still) and when he discovered that she wasn't the frumpy lady he'd thought she was but a gorgeous goddess of a figure, he was in luurrrve. Puh-lease, enough with the

bullshit *already*.

Frances Kilbracken, as much as the writer wanted her to look like Elizabeth Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice*- I am sorry to say- the lack of a backbone and humor (totally *unlike* Elizabeth Bennet actually) only made her look like an airhead with a sucky attitude. I liked her fine in the beginning but as soon as the crap after the wedding began, I started having these weird feelings of wanting to rattle her to her senses, or slap her senseless until she did something about the unfair treatment that she received and made use of her so-called wits. Ugh! I felt sorry for her alright, but I also felt disappointed and revolted in her lack of self-esteem, which believe me was very *very* low. She was a doormat all the way, and by God, I felt like I should just kick her and yell "Stupid, stupid, STUPID!" just to make myself feel better.

The author tried to revive the story by throwing a somewhat interesting suspense lying just down the bend but I already had too much of the cringe-inducing, annoyingly PAINFUL experience that I left the rest for some other time, maybe. **looks sheepish, though not really**

Well, its been over a month and I never picked it back up (I don't think I have it in me to start again), so I think I'll just finish with the review.

So anywaaaaay, I didn't actually finish the book... Damn, just the thought about picking it up again gives me the creep. While a lot of you might have loved this book or maybe liked it, this wasn't my idea of romance and happily ever after. I was sorely disheartened, as this was my first book by Catherine Coulter and I feel a little skittish about picking another one by her. Hopefully, I'll try some other novel by Coulter soon and it might turn out to be awesome, but for that I think I need to wait. **sigh**
