



Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress

Theresa Romain

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One good proposition deserves another...

Heiress Augusta Meredith can't help herself—she stirs up gossip wherever she goes. A stranger to Bath society, she pretends to be a charming young widow, until sardonic, darkly handsome Joss Everett arrives from London and uncovers her charade.

Now they'll weave their way through the pitfalls of the polite world only if they're willing to be true to themselves...and to each other...

Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress Details

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From Reader Review Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress for online ebook

herdys says

I'm turning into such a fangirl of Theresa Romain. Though her books are often not perfect, there is something so good about her dialogues and especially her characters that keeps you coming back for MORE. Joss was so noble and such a sweetheart, and though it took me more time to warm up to Augusta, she was clearly a great woman who had been wounded and hadn't recovered. I also really liked that our otp was working class and even if Augusta had money she still didn't belong to the Ton. It was a nice change from all the heroines trying to catch an Earl that we usually get in HR.

Though the romance was full of witty dialogues and heated moments, the best parts for me were when our otp would let their barriers down and show their true selves. Some HRs are hot, some are fluffy but this one is just so full of HEART. It may have been a slow burn, and while it took Augusta some time to come to terms with Joss and her feelings, in the end it was all SO WORTH IT!

Mary - Buried Under Romance says

Love~ Love~ Loved this book~ It's rather interesting how, at the time of my reading, the characters resembled people I know in real life. Mrs. Romain breathes life into Joss and Augusta, and they, in turn, tell me an almost bittersweet love story. :)

Amanda says

The first thing I loved about this book was its Bath setting. Add in two untitled, equally interesting protagonists, one being a POC and the other a ginger, and you have a very happy me. With its refreshing originality and Theresa Romain's wonderful writing style, *Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress* quickly wormed its way into my heart and on to favs list.

While the book did not feature the most plotty of stories, I have to say that I found Augusta's whole fake widow/lover hunt scheme quite fun and once Joss was added to the mix, it got even better. You know when you come across characters that, were it possible, you'd carry them around in your pocket? Well that's how I felt about Joss. I think he, with his dry wit and honest heart and Augusta, who was both selfish and selfless on different levels, complemented each other perfectly. Neither of them fit into society's strict molds: Joss being of Anglo-Indian descent and scandalous birth, while Augusta was bred with money earned through trade. But once drawn together, Joss and Augusta recognized themselves in one another; a fellow outsider longing for acceptance and respect. And once they both managed to work through individual issues holding them back from moving forward in life, they found love and their true worths.

Something I really enjoyed in particular about Joss and Augusta's relationship is how the usual hero/heroine roles were reversed. Augusta was the one avoiding love at all costs while Joss was the first to fall in love and

refused to settle for anything less. Augusta also technically held more power, being the wealthier of the two and was the one playing catchup in the end. This turnabout in the HR norm enhanced the overall feeling of the story and I loved it. Bless Theresa Romain for this gem of a book!

Just thought I'd close this review with a few of my favorite quotes :)

"And he had wondered how bright her hair would appear under the cold northern sky."

"You may call me Joss."

"Joss." She tested it out.

He nodded.

She nodded back. It felt...good. As though the window separating her from the world had opened, just a crack

"My hands are always cold," she said.

"Then I always want to hold them."

*"The **ultimate intimacy** happens when two people want nothing more than to be together, and when being together is a pleasure in itself. When the joining of bodies is more than a lust slaked; it's heart to heart and mind to mind."*

*"No one had a perfect life. Everyone lied sometimes, even if when they say **I'm quite well, thank you**. Augusta had been selfish, so selfish, to act as though her pain was worse. As though she had no hope for recovery. To convince herself that, because she had not been loved once, she could not be loved, and so words of love ought never to be trusted again.*

***You are worthy**, Joss had told her. **Just as you are**.*

And this was the other direction in which life could slope. A man could be knit together in trickery and scandal, yet become steadfast and honorable.

And wickedly, beautifully honest."

Kay (aka) Miss Bates says

I had trouble with the first half of this novel, though I loved the hero, Joss, from the get-go. He's handsome, honourable, and witty-smart. The heroine is a bit of a mess, with some vague idea of becoming a fallen woman by disguising herself as a widow looking for a lover. The first half of the novel focussed on establishing the characters social and economic quandaries and their time together was at a minimum. The second half, however, as they make their way to each is awesome. The writing, especially, the dialogue is first-rate. If you'd like to read a more extensive review, please follow the link:

<http://missbatesreadsromance.com/2015...>

I received an e-ARC from Sourcebooks, via Netgalley.

kris says

Augusta Meredith has more money than sense. While visiting Bath with a friend, she creates the persona "Mrs. Flowers" and looks to take a lover to overwrite the betrayal she felt at the hands of some asshole. Except Joss Everett shows up and calls her on her shit. This is unacceptable, obviously, so they pledge to help one another. Except Joss won't get his dick out and Augusta only wants sex, no love.

1. Here's the thing: while enjoyable, this book suffers from repetition. I don't know if I could have handled Augusta talking about how she was separated from the world by "a window" again, or how Joss was invisible or that they were both outsiders again. If you want to draw those comparisons, do! But use a light hand. We readers can connect the dots and realize that Joss and Augusta have a similar POV on the aristocracy: we don't need you to bash it into our heads every other page.
 2. Add to that the rather cyclical emotional turbulence and the delayed reveal of Augusta's Lady Pain (her downlow lover left her for another woman right after her parents died!) and it just didn't work for me. I liked that Joss develops some self-awareness and begins to question his place in the world and claim some autonomy. I didn't like that Augusta's self-revelations happen off page and between chapters--she is afraid and then she is not and the audience gets no glimpse into her journey to wanting Joss and his HEA.
 3. I LOVED Emily's secondary storyline, and the stark, messy portrayal of grief. That was, to me, the highlight of this book: the realization that loss is not a straight line to healing. That there are good days and hard days. That sometimes you must grieve alone, but sometimes you should grieve together. That you can survive, and that doesn't mean that you've forgotten or 'moved on'.
 4. Also, cramming the sex scene into the last chapter was kind of hilariously off-kilter. "I LOVE YOU" "DITTO" "LET'S HAVE SEX" "WHAT ABOUT YOUR HEAD WOUND" "I'M FINE" "OK SURE LET ME JUST LOCK THE DOOR SINCE I FORGOT TO DO IT LAST TIME"
 5. I should probably address Sutcliffe's raging addiction but I'm not quite sure what to say. His role seemed to be humorous in nature but knowing he's addicted in the manner he is made it far from funny and more...horrifying. And there wasn't anything to suggest hope for him, either? I don't know; he was an unsettling character, overall.
-

Becca says

Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress wasn't very scandalous, but it was romantic. Joss and Augusta are both spirited, intelligent, wounded people who have been skirting the fringes of polite society with no hope of ever fitting in. Joss is a second cousin of a baron and a man of mixed blood (his grandmother was Indian). Augusta is an heiress of a beauty company and has no noble relations whatsoever. Both have suffered indifference from those they loved and trusted and are hesitant to risk their hearts again.

In this story, we are treated to witty banter, soul searching, and a sprinkle of mystery. What I love about Romain's stories is the true-to-life emotions she captures. In this story, we are reminded that everyone has their private pain, regardless of wealth, social class, or the mask they show the world. Through each character Romain sketches, she emphasizes the importance of love and honesty with oneself, close friends, family, and lovers.

This story was not what I expected it to be and my Kindle edition ended at 83% so I wasn't prepared for the ending when it came. But, now that I have been reflecting on it, the story was complete. Joss and Augusta challenged each other and slowly peeled away at each other's defenses until finally seeing that they were meant to be together. Lady Tallant, Lord Chentwith, and Baron Sutcliffe all added to the character backdrop, while Bath lent its scenery and slower pace.

Do not expect a lot of action or intrigue in this novel. Romain's trademark is more of an emotional journey. We start with exciting, peppery dialogue as our leading characters poke at each other, then we transition into more private, somewhat painful introspection as the masks fall away, and we end with rich, cleansing confessions and a happily ever after. This series by Romain has been lovely and I think she will only get better and better from here.

Lover of Romance says

As much as I want to say that I loved this story, I am unable to recommend this one. I honestly don't know if it's me, but I have the most difficult time with the author. I find that her voice in the story just never seems to catch me in any way. I have tried Theresa Romain out in the past, and never had much success with her stories, which is sad for me, since the blurbs sound amazing, but I think I just am unable to connect with her stories. It is pretty sad, especially when you find a book you want to enjoy but just can't. It tends to be very frustrating. I went into this story knowing that I could only give it 50 pages or so. That is my new rule now, because I know if I am going to enjoy a book or be able to get into it once I reach that 50 page mark. I felt like the story had potential, but I just couldn't see the connection between the characters or be able to enjoy the set up very well. I actually gave myself a few days with this story, and just couldn't get into it and I didn't want to have to force myself to try to enjoy reading this one, there was no enjoyment for me for this one. I am not sure if I will try this author out again, which is regrettable since I know how many others just love her books. Maybe one day I can try her out again and find a story to love and enjoy. Heartbreaking!

Ilze says

Theresa Romain's "Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress"

Lovely book that has to be savored slowly like good wine to get the full effect of the writing, the characters and their growth through the story. Augusta Meredith starts off the story by propositioning Joss Everett, the hero, but because of the things he has experienced in his life, and because he's a good man, he refuses, although he is strongly attracted to Augusta. I didn't like Augusta at first - she's trying to run from herself and her sad experiences in love, but my sympathy for her increased, especially on second reading of the book. Joss, on the other hand, is living a very circumscribed existence as secretary to a wastrel of a baron, even though he is the man's second cousin and on that basis alone deserves a lot more respect from his employer. Augusta makes him realize that there is a lot more potential in him than his cousin realizes or needs and that he should act on this realization, while Joss makes Augusta realize that she is not limited by her previous experiences in love - near the end of the book she says to herself "The ultimate oblivion wasn't in losing herself, it was in giving herself. In thinking of someone else rather than dwelling on her own disappointments."

Wollstonecraftmegirl says

The start/finish dates on this speak volumes: I have devoured this book in less than a day and can I just start by saying: Yes, Romain, YES! I knew you had a five star in you & here it is: the first two in the trilogy [which is, overall, just excellent from start to finish] nearly made it for me & this one absolutely got there. Just: All. The. Squeeee. This has everything the first two books had. Fantastic, fantastic characterization (srsly, there are characters who emerge for less than half a chapter & I have an absolute sense of who they are and how they operate). Dialogue which is period appropriate and dense and clever and witty. Romain doesn't baby any of it, she writes with complexity and respects her audience enough to know they'll follow it. There's nothing too challenging about the setting - it's largely front room to ballroom to park but that works for me & allows the story to build beautifully. The story, and the romance because, oh boy, is it good. Two wonderfully layered, flawed characters who are drawn to one another. Augusta who is struggling to find herself after a series of traumatic events and Joss who is struggling to be content with himself as a result of his complicated background. They fit with each other and reading about them work that fact out is an absolute delight from start to finish. The sex: there isn't enough of it, but what there is, is very, very good. One of the best oral sex scenes I've read in a historical. I really have no criticisms. The matchmaker thing sort of fell away a bit, but that's fine. Oh, and the title is daft, in fact all the titles have been daft, both not appropriate for the actual stories and implying the contents are more froth than substance which they absolutely are not. But these are minor quibbles. This book was fantastic & I cannot say enough good things.

Sophia says

New to me author and series that I've been seeing a lot of buzz about so naturally I had to alleviate my curiosity and give it a go. I was up for a flirty, slightly different historical romance.

This was the third book in a trilogy, but I got pretty lucky and didn't have any trouble feeling comfortable following the story. I saw a few hints that characters might have been introduced earlier, but it didn't affect the story. Really the only question I had after finishing was who the matchmaker was in the Matchmaker Trilogy title. Maybe the countess? Feel free to share if you know since I'm full of curiosity.

The story opens with heiress to her late father's scent business, Augusta Meredith, weary of her place on the fringe of high society and of her life in general determined to really change things up. Her opportunity comes when she accompanies her friend to Bath where she seizes the moment to pretend to be someone she's not in the persona of the widowed Mrs. Flowers. She will flirt and feel out the men of the town. She will tease the men, take on as a lover and discard him in turn. Her scheme depends on the Countess remaining quietly out of Bath society while she recovers and that nobody turns up who really knows her. Unfortunately, her first night out proves her scheme may be undone when she encounters Joss Everett, a poor relation to his cousin a nobleman she encountered in London. Can she persuade him to go along with her scheme? Trust a man?

Joss is not in Bath for his health or his own leisure. No, he is there to fix yet another problem his oblivious cousin has stirred up. There is a blackmailer to find and a family property to sell all so his cousin can continue his life of mild debauchery. Joss doesn't fit in with his own family and the Ton because of his Indian grandmother and ne'er do well profligate of a father. He has realistic plans to eventually leave the employ of his own cousin and go to work as a man of business for someone with real need of him. He is distracted from his own troubles and his frustrating cousin's blackmailer when he encounters the delectable Augusta Meredith pretending to be something she is not. He senses some of the truth behind her cold,

ruthless scheme and warns her it won't work the way she wants, but still reassures her that he will keep her secret. She doesn't trust him and insists on a bargain. She will help him locate prospective buyers for his cousin's land and a man who can nose out secrets if he helps her find the right gentleman to seduce.

Um'kay, this one didn't grab me in the beginning and I struggled to stay with it most of the time. The basis for the story was on shaky ground from page one once I understood where it was going just as was the heroine's character. The hero had promise, but even he wasn't enough to balance out the other. The blackmail plot was of interest, but it didn't provide that sense of tension and immediacy. The romance? No go for me there too. The heroine insisted that it was all lust and I didn't see how she would inspire love. If this had been one of those madcap comedy stories then I would have been okay with some of what I was seeing, but it wasn't (or at least I didn't find humor in it other than the Countess and Joss' silly cousin). Honestly, the trouble for me was the heroine.

Augusta's scheme didn't sit well with me and brought down my respect for her. I never saw her the way the book portrayed her. Use and discard is never okay in my book particularly when the other person is an innocent bystander even if they consent. Then there was the trouble of believability that she was some shrewd woman with business acumen, but yet her scheme as a whole didn't impress me with her smarts. She is a wealthy heiress yet somehow she is supposedly passed over by everyone in the Ton. Didn't make sense without her doing something vulgar or unforgivable to society's rules which she didn't. Joss is the one that is poor and struggling under true societal stigmas from his rake of a dad and bi-racial heritage, but she repeatedly acted like her 'poor little rich girl' thing made them alike or that he just needed to buck up and get over all his 'trivial' issues. Joss kept calling her strong, but I didn't see that in the woman that was so filled with fear and distrust that she was afraid to be herself and refused to try for a real relationship.

I chose to keep reading to see if something would change my mind and I was given nothing to justify her behavior. In fact, my dislike of Augusta just grew the way she was playing hot and cold with Joss and held tenaciously to her schemes even though it didn't have a prayer in the first place. Some guy dumped you? Oh boo hoo! It was all just so implausible and contrived-feeling for me.

Was it a total loss? No, not by a long shot. While I didn't like Augusta and what she was up to, I could still appreciate the spark between her and Joss. They had some witty dialogue particularly when he was calling her on her crap or she was jolting him out of his self-pity. He tended to be morose and she made him see himself differently.

I could also enjoy those sparkling side characters. I think the Countess with her quiet strength and zest for life was my favorite.

Using Bath as a backdrop was a winner with me too. I loved the description of activities and places that are there without overpowering the story.

I appreciated that both the characters were from that emerging middle merchant class who are too genteel for the lower classes, but not blue-blooded enough for the upper classes so an interesting situation.

Overall, it was just tolerable for me. I got that use and discard thing the heroine planned in the beginning and couldn't shake it. I'll probably try something else by the author to see if a different heroine and her circumstances make the difference. I don't feel this book is a universal fail and that others who enjoy spicy historical romance might really like it. Maybe next time.

My thanks to Sourcebooks Casablanca and Net Galley for the opportunity to read this one in exchange for an honest review.

Andrea says

This was an okay read for me. It was easy to read, and had some cute moments such as this:

"If you chose to meet with Whittingham or Duffy, take care not to...oh I don't know what to call it. 'Man flirt' maybe." Joss stumbled. In righting himself, he shook her hand from his forearm. "Man flirt? *Man flirt?* "You know what I mean. All those sly smiles and jokes that may or may not be bawdy and chatter about sporting events." "I know what you mean, and I would not call it 'man flirting'. It is *conversation*"

But other than that... The story just never really grabbed me. Augusta shows up in Bath, desperate to replace one bad memory of a man with a new one, and decides to introduce herself as a widow and find a lover. I never really warmed up to her. A lot of time is spend with her discovering who she really is, and as much as I usually love such a drama-free story, this just never really impressed me for some reason I can't put my finger on. I did love the hero, though. Joss is a sweetheart, and his issues (Indian grandmother, not feeling accepted by his own family because of it, caught somewhere in between 'impoverished family member' and 'glorified servant' and all that comes with that) made for a nice change.

All in all, I'm glad I read it and found a new author that delivers lovely stories without too much drama and genuinely nice people!

fleurette says

I am positively surprised by this story. I was completely unfamiliar with the author and the book wasn't really popular with only 228 ratings. I probably wouldn't consider it if not for a challenge it suited perfectly. Or I would for this wonderful cover I totally fall in love with when I saw it for the first time.

The story is okay. I like Augusta though the motives of her actions are not always obvious to me. I also really like Joss, the way he treats Augusta and his bitter sense of humour. It is nice to read about the lower parts of ton, although I prefer the classic stories about aristocracy. I also generally prefer stories set in London but Bath setting is okay this time.

I would like the blackmailer part to be more exposed, maybe with some more investigation. But the real identity of the blackmailer gives an interesting twist.

And this wonderful cover! I wish there were more covers like this. I'm giving this book 3 stars and I will try some other books by this author in the future.

Lady Wesley says

Edited 28 March 2016: RITA Nominee - Historical Romance Short. Well deserved!

Theresa Romain is a new-to-me-author, but based upon this book, I will definitely be reading her other titles. I picked this one because it sounded different from so many other Regency romances, and I was not disappointed.

Hero without title or fortune. Check. Joss Everett is an Anglo-Indian with no fortune who toils as secretary to cousin, the indolent Lord Sutcliffe.

Heroine without title or prospects. Check. Augusta Meredith is wealthy, yes, but as heiress to her father's beauty products company, she is not accepted as a member of the ton.

Setting outside London. Check. When Augusta's friend Lady Tallant needs to take the waters of Bath, Augusta goes along as her companion. For reasons not entirely clear at first, Augusta decides to masquerade as "Mrs. Flowers," a respectable widow, and since practically nobody in Bath knows her, she can get away with it.

We soon learn that Augusta has decided that she needs to take a lover, one who does not know that she is fabulously wealthy. She is finding the task challenging, however, until she encounters Joss Everett. He knows who she really is, but he agrees not to reveal her identity.

Joss is an intriguing character. He has worked for many years as a man of business to his cousin Lord Sutcliffe. Sutcliffe, who is being blackmailed, promises Joss one hundred pounds if he finds the blackmailer. Joss has followed the trail to Bath, where one of the blackmail notes was posted. He desperately wants the money so he can leave his cousin's employ. Sutcliffe is utterly self-centered and treats his cousin abominably, but we don't quite hate him because he is so clueless about his behavior. At times, he is almost funny.

Joss reluctantly accepts Augusta's help in searching for the blackmailer, and she arranges for him to meet several gentlemen who might have knowledge that would help. At the same time, Joss and Augusta are becoming closer to one another and moving from flirtation to attraction to intimacy, where they finally can show their true selves.

The progress of their romance is beautifully revealed through long conversations between them. Although there is a mystery, there is not a lot of action, but the dialogue and the introduction of several secondary characters keeps the air of suspense alive.

Theresa Romain excels at creating interesting, complex characters – not just the hero and heroine but the supporting players as well. Augusta's friend, Emily, Lady Tallant, has a small but heart-breaking role. Lord Sutcliffe is a typical wealthy, spoiled aristocrat, but he has a few redeeming qualities. Lord Chatfield, who helps Joss with his investigation, is charming but rather intimidating in his vast power.

Ms Romain's talent for dialogue stands out, from witty banter to heartfelt confessions between Joss and Augusta, and her characters' voices are true to the period. She also paints a vivid picture of Bath – from the climate to the geography to the familiar sites such as the Pump Room.

Even though I occasionally became impatient with conversations that lasted longer than I would have liked, I truly cannot criticize anything about this book. It was a pleasure to read from start to finish.

OLT says

This is the type of romance that bores many readers. There's lots of talk and very little sex. There are no spies, villains, abductions, Big Misunderstandings, and no tedious and excessive talk about tented breeches,

etc. I enjoyed this for the good writing, excellent dialogue and a love slow in developing and slow to be acted upon intimately. So call me old, but if I want excessive pages of sex, I'll go to the erotica section. If I want real romance, somebody like Theresa Romain is the way to go.

Middle-class but very wealthy soap-company heiress Augusta Meredith has recently lost both parents in a tragic accident and at the same time lost the man she had loved and lost her 'virtue' to when he threw her over for another rich woman. Hero Joss Everett is a low-ranking member of the upper class, cousin to a baron and working as that baron's man of affairs. Joss has Indian blood so is neither fish nor fowl in society. Not very acceptable in the upper class and treated like a servant by his own family. Not only that but his self esteem is so low that he quietly accepts his poor treatment by the baron.

Joss and Augusta are acquaintances from London but meet here in Bath where Augusta is pretending to be a Mrs. Flowers, looking to take a lover in an affair that she will be totally in control of, not wishing to be vulnerable to hurt again. Joss is in Bath on a mission for his cousin the baron, whose indiscretion with a maid has him being blackmailed. If Joss is successful in his endeavors for the baron, he's hoping to be able to leave his position and find something that will give him more self-respect.

So there. It's not a big deal story. What's the big deal for me is the writing. Any HR author can write a story. Not just any HR author can write a story well. There's humor, poignancy, warmth and romance, all developed by a talented writer.

Caz says

I've given this an A at AAR - so the full 5 stars.

Theresa Romain's *Matchmaker* trilogy has been one of the most consistently good series of books I can remember reading in recent months. All three have made it to my keeper shelf and the series has turned Ms. Romain – someone whose books I've always enjoyed - into an auto-buy author.

In **Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress** readers are reacquainted with Miss Augusta Meredith, the “soap factory” heiress who appeared briefly in the previous book in the series, *To Charm a Naughty Countess*. Having decided that London is probably not the best place to carry out her current scheme, Augusta has retreated to Bath with her friend, Lady Tallant, who has recently miscarried a baby and has gone there to take the waters and restore her health. Augusta has rather audaciously elected to call herself Mrs. Flowers and act the part of a merry widow, someone who isn't regularly targeted by fortune hunters and whose behaviour isn't always viewed by hostile and critical eyes.

She enjoys the freedom that accompanies her supposed widowhood and feels a slight lifting of the weight that has dogged her ever since the sudden deaths of her parents and the desertion of the young man with whom she had believed herself in love. She's tired of being herself and never knowing if she is sought for her money or for her person, and has decided it's time to take a stand. She plans to take a lover so that in her mind, she can revenge herself upon men in general and upon the man who took what he wanted from her and then cruelly discarded her. She wants a man who will dance to her tune and whom she can then throw away without a moment's disquiet.

Not long after Augusta has begun looking about her for likely candidates, she is dismayed to discover an acquaintance among the crowds present at an assembly. Bath is a small town, and the game will be up should

Mr. Josiah Everett reveal her to be a wealthy spinster rather than a widow of reduced means.

Joss is in Bath in order to execute a commission for his cousin, Lord Sutcliffe, a man so drugged up most of the time that it's a miracle he is able to find his own arse without Joss' help. Sutcliffe, who is Joss' cousin as well as his employer, is being blackmailed over the fact that he seduced and impregnated a housemaid, and, as the bulk of his fortune is actually his wife's, he has no alternative but to find the money to pay off the villain by other means. He sends Joss to Bath to find a buyer for some land – a scheme to which Joss has agreed mostly because he has a stake in the outcome. Sutcliffe takes Joss for granted and treats him abysmally for the most part, and Joss has had enough of being at his beck and call, so he's tapped Sutcliffe for a percentage of the proceeds of the sale which should give him enough money as to enable him to find employment somewhere else.

He's as surprised to see Augusta in Bath as she is to see him – although he's much more pleased. Until, that is, she lets him in on her secret and propositions him, telling him that all she really needs is a man and that he “would do.”

“I would do? ...Because I am convenient? Or because I am entirely unworthy of marriage?”

His tone froze her fingers, and she withdrew her hand to her lap. “Because” – she raised her own chin - “You bathe regularly and are not bad looking. As I mentioned previously.”

“I may swoon.”

Augusta then proposes a bargain of another kind. If Joss will keep her true identity secret, she will help him to find someone to purchase Sutcliffe's land. She has a good head for business (as shown by the fact that she has managed to convince the board of Meredith Beauty that her ideas are really theirs) and is quickly able to give Joss a list of names of potential purchasers, together with one of a man who “knows things”, who might be able to help to smoke out the blackmailer.

The romance between Joss and Augusta is deeply felt and beautifully developed - and their verbal sparring is an absolute delight. Clever, smart-mouthed heroes are my drug of choice, and Joss possesses a biting, dead-pan wit he exercises frequently. He's also a very honourable and proud man who, while most definitely attracted to Augusta, refuses to be used, especially as he believes her to have found him unworthy of the possibility of there being anything more meaningful between them.

But what he's really doing is projecting his own views onto her. He discerns early on that Augusta has a low sense of self-worth, but what he doesn't see is that his own isn't much better. His cousin treats him as though he's nothing, but Joss has *allowed* it all these years because of his own self-esteem and identity issues. He's the grandson of a lord – but his grandmother was Indian, and while his Anglo-Indian heritage isn't something he's taken great pains to hide, he doesn't advertise it, either.

The issue of identity is one of the themes running through the book. Augusta assumes another identity because she wants to be someone else, only to discover that the best parts of her are those she had wanted to escape; Joss knows next to nothing about his heritage and identity as an Anglo-Indian and by the end of the book has decided to change that. Both characters have to come to a sense of their own self-worth in order for their relationship to work, and it's through their friendship and support for each other that they are able to find it.

Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress is a terrific read – poignant, tender, funny and sexy by turns. Ms. Romain's writing is intelligent and laced with wit and humour; and the book is peppered with some truly beautiful, yet understated prose.

I'm waiting not at all patiently to see what she's going to come up with next!
