



Mistress of My Fate

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Set during a period of revolution and turmoil, *Mistress of My Fate* is the first book in a trilogy about Henrietta Lightfoot, a young woman who was abandoned as a baby and raised alongside her cousins, noble children of a lord and lady. At just sixteen years old, circumstance and a passionate love affair tear Henrietta away from everything she knows, leading to a new life fending for herself on the streets of 18th century London as a courtesan, gambler, and spirited intellect of the city.

Mistress of My Fate Details

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Author : Hallie Rubenhold

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From Reader Review Mistress of My Fate for online ebook

Crystal says

3.5 stars. If I had rated this book at page 200, I likely would have given it 4.5 stars or possibly even 5 as I was rapt in attention to it. But at the midway point the small points of botheration began to become bigger issues for me.

I'll begin with what I did love. I loved the overall tone. Hallie Rubenhold held well to her style and dialect. Consistency is important and she handled that well. I loved the setting and all the historical touches she added such as the details of the protagonist's [Henrietta] finery, though I do think the world could have been more immersive. I would have loved more description of the sets and landscape. I also could've used a little less of her mentioning "a la mode." I also would've loved a bit more "real world" talk between Henrietta and her lover, Allenham. She sought to know very little of him. That doesn't seem like something a girl with a curious mind would do. I enjoyed the mysterious note that it ended on. I'm curious to learn more about Allenham, Henrietta's love interest. I have a suspicion that he is not entirely a good man.

In addition, I loved the memoir aspect. First person is not my favorite perspective to read but having a narrator alleviates the trouble I often have with that. And being a historical fiction, having a storyteller feels right.

What keeps this novel from being tremendous for me was the drive of plot - namely Henrietta making stupid decisions. I do not mind a protagonist making a couple wrong decisions here or there, afterall, having flaws is human so I don't need a perfect character but when it's the 3rd or 4th or 5th time a character makes a stupid decision then you know that it's not authentic and that it's just to drive the book in a direction the author wants. At that point, I'm slightly removed from "the world" and thinking of how the author's mind is working. But Henrietta was not "thrown" into her terrible situations. She put herself there through terrible life choices. She was a victim in many ways but in many other ways it could have all been prevented if she had just listened or thought things through.

Hallie Rubenhold also overdrives some points. In the first quarter of the book, she is so desperate for you to understand that Henrietta is meek, obedient and mild-mannered that she mentions it half a dozen times. An author must remember the intelligence of her reader and their ability to pick up on key points. There is no need to beat them over the head with it.

Another point of contention for me was a quick shift in character. For instance in Chapter 20, Henrietta is shocked by encountering two courtesans. She is mortified by their lifestyle and fears for her reputation. She firmly turns down their offer to join their household. Then in the very next chapter, she moves into her first master's house and within 2 chapters sleeps with him to gain what she needs. The shift from "oh no I could never!" to "I must do what I must" happened way too quickly with such little character shift. As a reader, we do not see her processing the consequences of not taking that step.

I'm not entirely convinced of Henrietta's bravery or cleverness which the author states on a few occasions because we are very much more-so subjected to her depression, crying and despondency. I am tolerant to characters crying, especially in print, but even I grew weary of Henrietta's crying. Every being cries and her situation is understandably depressing but her bemoaning, crying, shock, naivety do not match with the strong and bold woman the author suggests. I attribute this to the lack of connection between her thought process and her actions as was my previous point.

The book needed a bit more light. In the last quarter of the book, when novels are usually once again picking up steam for an exciting conclusion, it was simply more of the same unhappiness. Hallie Rubenhold needed to find a way to balance the tragedy of Henrietta's life with an entertaining story for the reader and unfortunately the last section does not have the variables needed. You can only stay down for so long as a reader before you need some moments of levity or hope.

However, this is not to say I hated the book. My absolutely favorite thing about this book is the aspect of

feminism within it. The explanation of how women are property to be traded and bent to the will of men. The solidarity (mostly) amongst the females within the story and the mutual understanding of how they must manipulate to lead a life they want - not what their male counterparts want. There is a great balance of women being a product of their time and also being forward-thinking.

I will definitely read Book Two of this series. However, if the same problems plague the second story, I'm afraid at that point, I'll bow out of Henrietta's memoirs.

BRNTerri says

Pub. Info: Grand Central Publishing, 1/2013

First Published: 2011 in the UK

Genre: Historical Fiction

Setting: England, late 1700s

Author Site: [Link](#)

My Grade: A-

MY THOUGHTS:

Henrietta/Hetty: A lonely, naive teenager with only her cousin for a friend. She found herself in dire straits a few times and made some adult decisions because she felt she had no choice. She did the best she could.

Lady Catherine: Hetty's spoiled cousin. Not the nicest person to Hetty. I enjoy secondary characters like her a whole lot. I wish her character and her maids had been around longer. I just know she had some evil up her sleeve.

John St. John: Her mother's ex-lover. He's forty-four and she becomes his mistress at seventeen. I like him at first but he becomes so jealous that I start to get tired of him.

George Allenham: Hetty's love interest. I liked him at the beginning but as the story went on and he wasn't in it too much I began to dislike his character. I never understood why Hetty was so obsessed with being with him. I didn't think he was worth her time.

Philip Quindell: Hetty's 'protector'. He's about twenty-four, lovestruck/borderline obsessive and immature. I found him to be a bit annoying.

This was an enjoyable read told in first person narration. It spans about three years. Most of the story takes place in England and the last part, France.

My favorite part is when Hetty becomes St. John's mistress and devises a great plan to escape. I can't tell you anymore about it! My least favorite part is the last sixty-five pages or so. The story went in a different direction that I was expecting and it was a real letdown. I wish the last part could be rewritten, especially the ending.

This is one of just a few books that I've read lately that I really liked. I like historical fiction where the heroine is down on her luck or facing bad circumstances. There was something lacking in this. It needed more twists and turns, needed to be darker. It was a bit too mild. According to the author's website, the next in

the series, *The French Lesson*, is to be darker. Yay!

Henrietta has her own website! [Link](#).

I received this from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Beadyjan says

Pretty good romantic romp through 18th century London, I thought (hoped?) it might be a little more risque than it turned out to be, especially as Hallie Rubenhold is a renowned historian with a fondness for the seamier side of historical London and is the author of *Harris's List of the Covent Garden Ladies* a historical look at brothels.

Mistress of my fate tells the story of orphaned Henrietta brought up by an Aunt and uncle as companion to her cousin Lady Catherine who seems to be a nasty piece of work treating Henrietta like dirt yet seeming to inspire devotion from her impoverished relative. Fate steps in to allow 16 year old Henrietta a glimpse of love - unfortunately to the man betrothed to Catherine. This infatuation leads Henrietta astray in more ways than one and leads her towards a very different life to the one she has been brought up to. Although the story is narrated by an ageing Henrietta, this book ends when she is still a young woman. Its a satisfying read, she has some hard choices to make and her life isn't easy.

It began with the tantalising prospect of making me think, maybe it was going to be a little like *Slammerkin* but it seemed to try a little too hard to fit a wide range of genres and suit lots of readers and ended up being a little too flowery in speech and a hint too much "Regency romance" to really blow me away.

However Henrietta was a well rounded, rather flawed, unreliable character who I ended up kind of liking and the book left me hanging enough to want to read the planned book 2 in this series.

Éowyn says

Hallie Rubenhold's foray into the world of historical fiction brings us to Henrietta Lightfoot and the first volume of her memoirs. I confess that I didn't realise that this was the first book in a planned series and felt a bit frustrated at the end of the book as there were many unresolved questions I was dying to know the answer to!

Books written in the first person can sometimes feel a bit contrived, but that wasn't a problem here at all. An older Henrietta relates the 'true' story of her life, evidently in answer to some untruths put about by a character we have yet to properly meet in this first volume; I'm sure all will become apparent later on!

Many of the characters who weave their way through Rubenhold's tale are actually real, historical figures. Even her fictional characters owe something to the real life experiences of other Georgian inhabitants. This certainly isn't prettified historical fiction; we follow the initially very naive Henrietta through her ups and downs. The main action of the novel takes place over the space of about a year, when Henrietta is still only

17. I look forward to the next instalment!

Sue Smith says

Lordy I'm glad that's over.

I know lots of other readers out there loved it - or at least felt it deserved higher ratings than what I gave it. I felt that 2 stars was even pushing it. It's books like this one that make me wish Goodreads had half star rating options too it wasn't a complete troll but there were times that is was certainly less than ok 1.5 stars would have fit the bill perfectly!

Anyways, enough whining on the rating system! Lets move onto whining about the book!!!!!! I'll be honest - the premise of the book is great and has merit. It was very well researched and the writing was original and well done. My beef the main heroine that the story revolves around was just was just was hmmmmm. (Be nice my inner voice says, quickly followed by that other voice that says - f that, be truthful!) *sigh* Fine. Truthfully people, through the entire book I just wanted to slap that bitch silly. Maybe I'm just getting old (so my kids tell me), but I just can't handle the snivelly, whiny poor me, arm-across-the-eyes 17 year old declarations of situations that the stupid b*tch just put herself into in the first place. I mean - honestly - once is ok, but over and over again is just over the top. Spaaaaaaaare me. It just overshadowed all the merits the book had otherwise. She didn't come across as an adventurous, strong character at all. All that moaning and groaning just made her ridiculous. If the story is supposed to be about making lemonade from lemons then lets keep to that promise instead of just leaving it sour and shitty.

I think the worst of it all is that this book is supposed to be followed by more of her exploits (being that this is book one of her life).

Well count me out. I honestly don't care about her fate.

Mieneke says

Sometimes a book is pushed on you by the universe, whether you planned to read it or not. When I was approached about reviewing Hallie Rubenhold's *The French Lesson*, I learned that this was the second book in a series, but that it stood alone very well. Thus I agreed and decided that I'd just jump in at book two and skip the first book, *Mistress of My Fate*, since I didn't have that one. Somewhere, someone or something had other ideas, because no sooner had I said yes than I got an email from an online retailer offering *Mistress of My Fate* as part of a sale. I got the message: the universe wanted me to read this book. And with good reason, because apparently it knew I would love the book.

Mistress of My Fate is a historical fiction novel set in 1789 to 1791. This is a tumultuous era, which would change Western Europe forever, largely due to the Revolution in France and the subsequent rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. However, narratives set in this era are often centred on France, not England—or elsewhere for that matter. Seeing how events in France impacted on English society — or in the case of *Mistress of My Fate*, how little it impacts many of the characters — was an interesting new angle. Do note however, that while the setting and many of the characters are historical, the account contained in the narrative, including its protagonists, is wholly fictional, so there are plenty of surprises.

I loved the tone of this book. It felt very much of its time, i.e., the late eighteenth century, reminding me of books such as Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. This is reinforced by the fact that the story of the book is fictional, even if the setting isn't. Because of this, it feels as if you are reading an eighteenth-century contemporary novel. Still, even if the tone echoes the era the story it is set in, the writing is far more accessible and quite modern. Where in the eighteenth century a story like Henrietta's would have been told with censure, leaving its readers scandalised and titillated, and as a way to warn young ladies to not stray from virtue, *Mistress of My Fate* is no morality tale. The narrative is modern in its feminism and its exploration of female agency. For, while Hetty feels driven by circumstance, she is the one who makes the choices that drive her life; she wants to be the mistress of her own fate and finds that to attain that freedom, she has to abandon all she has been taught to think right, proper, and virtuous. In other words, defy all of societal expectations and demands on the conduct of a young woman of good breeding.

Henrietta is the heart and soul of the novel. I love the mix of the older Henrietta telling her tale — including breaking the fourth wall and addressing the reader, sometimes by name — and the younger Hetty we see in the narrative. There are a lot of wry observations about the folly of youth, but also some snark about how some people have maligned and mistreated her. Whether in the 18th or twenty-first century, teenagers always think they are immortal and Hetty is no exception. Her desperate decision to flee Melmouth and find Allenham is both foolhardy and amazing. The chemistry between Hetty and Allenham was awesome and I really enjoyed their scenes together. Despite all of this I kept having a nagging sense that Allenham might turn out to be a cad. I kept wondering whether this was a doomed affair or true love, though I was actively hoping it would be the latter.

Mistress of My Fate provides a close look at the scandalous side of eighteenth-century London high society, where kept mistresses were a fact of life and in some cases even accepted at court. These demi-mondaines were the It girls of their times. Often pragmatic and sometimes mercenary, for some of these girls becoming a "fallen woman" was the only way up and out of poverty and a way to provide for their families. Rubenhold doesn't shy away from looking at the practical everyday realities they faced, such as always having a plan B in case their current keeper tired of them and more immediately anti-conception and in case it failed the various abortifacients in use. When children did result from these liaisons, they were often given up to the father to be raised elsewhere. Hetty herself being the first example we encounter. But this also meant that the children could be used as leverage, non-compliance meant mothers might never see them again. It was heart-breaking and yet also echoed the hard pragmatism these women needed to live by to survive; letting the children be raised by their fathers would mean giving them opportunities they could never provide themselves. But in Hetty's case it felt very much like history repeating itself, in more ways than one, and I was left wondering at how many more of these illegitimate daughters followed in their mothers' footsteps, willingly or unwillingly.

I loved *Mistress of my Fate*. It had a great voice and I fell in love with Henrietta Lightfoot and her candid account of her life. I'm glad that I had *The French Lesson* on hand so I could return to Hetty immediately and find out what happened next. If you enjoy historical fiction that isn't a retelling of an important or well-known historical person or event, *Mistress of My Fate* is sure to be to your tastes. I definitely recommend checking it out.

Barb says

The month of December has been crazier than most for me. A project that I've been working on for three

years will end on the 31st and I have logged in many more hours than I typically do preparing for the deadline. At the same time my husband and I are having an addition put on our house and I have been distracted by all of the choices and decisions that go into figuring out what we want and how we want it in our new space. Sometimes when there's a lot going on like this I have a difficult time focusing on what I'm reading. Not so in this case, *Mistress of My Fate* completely sucked me in and held my attention until the very last page.

I loved this story and the heroine Henrietta Ingerton, aka Henrietta Lightfoot. I know there are many readers who dislike narration in the first person but I have always liked it and this story is no exception. Henrietta speaks to the reader confessing her fall from grace and describing how she was forced to make the choices she did. She recounts her tale from the present day of 1835, when she is sixty-three years old, and takes us back to her youth growing up in her uncle Lord Ingerton's home of Melmouth with her cousin Lady Catherine. She also refers to her cousin Lord Dennington and cautions us not to believe the stories he has told, stating they have been circulated in an attempt to discredit her. Which makes you question her reliability as a narrator.

The initial event that triggers all the others that come to change Henrietta's circumstances could be viewed in more than one way. As I was reading I wasn't sure what the truth of the matter was or if I liked this narrator or not. Either way the story was compelling and pulled me in, I wanted to know more about this young girl and how she managed the choices she had, none of them seemed to be good ones.

I enjoyed the setting and the period details, as well as the complicated path Henrietta was forced to navigate. This is more of a romantic story than I typically read but I really enjoyed that thread and the tension it created throughout the novel. I'm looking forward to reading the next two books in this trilogy. I think fans of Historical Fiction will enjoy this as will fans of Historical Romance.

Lisa Creane says

The story of a Victorian-era young woman and her downfall (and, potentially her resurgence by book 3) is written as a hot melodrama in the first person, following Henrietta as she gets herself wronged time and again and then woe-is-me's for pages at a time.

It is not, for those who read romance, steamy. It is instead lovelorn and euphemistic and often silly, sometimes fun. The author's tongue-in-cheek use of Henrietta as a "cautionary tale" and "heroine for the ages" works pretty well. I like the tone, it was amusing. The writing is also great.

But the pace is slow, and the cheek of dragging this tale out for 3 books is galling. The story could have been wrapped up by the end of this book, which at 439 pages was already stretched beyond my patience.

Patty says

Mistress of My Fate is written as a confessional memoir by Miss Henrietta (Ingerton) Lightfoot as she tries

to set straight the rumors swirling about her and her actions. The book is written in the first person so you almost feel as if you are sitting with Ms. Lightfoot, sipping a cup of tea and listening to her tell you her sometimes sordid story. But what was a young girl to do? It was a time period when women had no rights, they had no way of making a place in the world without the protection of a family name or a husband. Miss Lightfoot was brought up in a noble household but as the child of a second son, long dead she had no prospects for a good marriage and is being groomed to be a lady in waiting to her cousin. Her cousin is a rather spoiled, unpleasant woman and used people only when she thinks they can serve her needs.

While on vacation in Bath both girls meet a young man and unfortunately they both fall in love. He too falls in love but societal demands and the needs of his estate cause him to pursue Henrietta's cousin while making plans to have all three of them live together. They think that this is better than never seeing each other again. But alas, it is not to be and a series of revelations and circumstances cause Henrietta to feel she must flee the only home she has ever known.

But as she writes in her book - there are no instructions for a young girl out on her own. She barely knows how to dress herself let alone how to get along in the world. She soon finds out that nothing is free and it takes her many hard lessons to effectively learn how to survive.

This is the first of three books detailing Ms. Lightfoot's life and loves and I can say that I'll be very much looking forward to the next installments. I found myself drawn into this very sad tale of a young girl who was quite wronged by people who should have cared for her. She was very naive as she ran away from home and despite many chances for her to learn from mistakes or from people trying to help her she, like most young people, thought she knew best. It was hard at times to read of her stupidity and not want to slap her face to wake her up! As I have written - I love a book that engenders that kind of emotion. (So far this year has been a good one for books - I hope it continues!) It takes Henrietta a while to figure out that she has to start thinking for herself and that sometimes she does need to listen to those that have come before and once she does a stronger woman emerges.

The book ends with lots and lots of questions that need answering. That bodes well for the next installment. Ms. Rubenhold brings the time period to life with all the grit and danger of a woman with nowhere to turn and nothing to use but her wits and her body to survive. France is about to explode into war and it is impacting the lives of the people in Henrietta's life and that sense of impending trouble underlies the story. The characters so far introduced are well developed and with our heroine you know that there is a lot more to know about her and her love to come in the next volumes. It's not going to be all sunshine and roses for these two, not at all. But I can't wait to see how it all plays out.

Minna says

I hesitate to label this a romance, as there is little that is particularly romantic about it beyond a chapter or two. Most of this story is a mix between a historical coming-of-age, a sob story, *Moll Flanders*, and the tale of a ~~real idiot~~ naive country girl who learns some hard lessons in the big scary city, about humanity and love and reality (at the time).

Most of the book, I couldn't get over how dumb the main character was. I understand she was sheltered, and all, and perhaps as a modern day reader things are more obvious to me than they would have been to her. I

thought by the end of the story she would have learned enough to avoid some terrible decisions, but the last decision she makes in the book proves she learned nothing from any of the well-meaning individuals who gave her advice. Clearly, Henrietta learns her lessons at some point since she narrates the book from a much older, wiser, and more worldly perspective. I'm just not sure if I want to wait around for her to 'wise up'.

The best part about the book was the historical detail and the use of some real-life characters to bolster the story. I had fun looking up (before I got to the historical note at the end, oh well) who was real, and who was fictitious.

I enjoyed the book, overall, but I don't know if I'd seek out the sequel.

Essie Fox says

This is a wonderful 'romp' with a strong female character who takes the reader on a whirlwind ride of love, betrayal and loss - and all set against the rich tapestry of Georgian London and its demimonde. Hallie Rubenhold is the most assured writer and she really knows her historical facts - but this is worn lightly and elegantly as she draws the reader into the world of Henrietta Lightfoot. If you liked Fanny Hill, you'll love this.

Susan says

This is a delightfully melodramatic historical novel, featuring our – initially – naïve and innocent heroine, and narrator, Henrietta. Henrietta is raised with her cousins and is that favourite of all characters in historical novels, the poor relation. She is the meek little mouse next to her brash, confident and spoilt cousin, Lady Catherine. However, despite Henrietta's lack of wealth or prospects, she manages to upstage Catherine by her beauty and angelic nature and, when Lady Catherine is about to marry the handsome George William Allenham, 2nd Baron Allenham of Herberston Park, his attraction to the lovely Henrietta unleashes a tragedy which results in Henrietta having to flee her relatives home.

What results is Henrietta's metamorphosis from a shy and unsure young girl to a mistress and a courtesan. However, this novel is often quite tongue in cheek and there is not really a real sense of danger. Whatever befalls the hapless Henrietta she recounts clearly and she always manages to fall on her feet – despite shedding her scruples quite quickly as events unfold. What emerges is a fun, historical romp. This is the first in a trilogy and I look forward to reading on with Henrietta's adventures in the next instalment.

Jennifer Mccann says

I was hoping for a lighthearted romp, and yes I got that. But I got something else too - a crappy book. Characters are not compelling, but rather whiney, shallow, immature, and stupid (although Hetty claims others think she is intelligent and clever.)

I had lots of problems with this book. I realize this is a "memoir" and only "part 1" but nevertheless, I felt like I was reading a longer book which was merely torn in half and the rest thrown away. Hundreds of pages

that only cover 2-3 years of Hetty's life. At this rate, we will need 15 volumes.

This book cannot stand on its own. A good serial novel does two things: stand alone and leave you wanting more. This is neither. Instead it annoying.

Let's start with Lord D. Right from the outset, Hetty claims she is writing this book to counteract the gossip of Lord D. However nowhere in the book do we have a big contretemps to explain why Lord D's role in her life is so large that she is compelled to write a memoir. Generally, that kind of thing should appear in the first book. Yes, yes, we can argue that it was a part 1, and she "saved" it for later, but if the entire premise is that this memoir is in response to Lord D, then maybe Lord D should have a role, you'd think?

Then there is Hetty's unwavering devotion to George Allenham, her one true love. Come on. What true love walks out of your life without even a note to say, "this is what happened"? Sure Hetty goes in search of him and gets an oblique note to do whatever she has to survive. Sorry. A great love would find a way and not abandon her fate to become a member of the demi-monde. Excuse the language, but what true deepest spiritual love sends a note that in essence says, "hey, I left, can't tell you why, love you, survive, I won't judge you if you become a whore, because after what I did, you will have to." Seriously? Hetty is always chasing George. Frankly, if you have to chase him down across Europe, he ain't worth it!

Then I found myself annoyed at the way Hetty would throw off tough times with "oh well, lesson learned." Here was the pattern: great drama, Hetty mired in self pity, pages and pages of hand wringing and tears, and oh woe to me, and then one freaking sentence that went something like this, "Later, I learned that it was good for that to happen." After pages of wallowing, and falling to the bottom of the pit of despair, there was no climbing up, no growth, no slow realization, it was... oh I am done pitying myself, it was no big deal.

Then there are her way stations. Yep, that is what her two "protectors" are during the book. Merely way stations, pages to fill, chapters to write. So many pages wasted on these dissipated and frankly, mentally ill characters.

Another annoyance, although minor, typifies the problem with the book in its entirety: perspective. The perspective of the author is someone older (by how much, we don't know-- is she in her 30s, 40s, 60s?) and yet she indulges in drama like a 15 year old girl.

Here is an example: about 60 pages before the end, there is a sentence like this: "And that, gentle reader, is how I became forever known as Mrs. Lightfoot." Hello 60 pages left? Not much time left to become the notorious "Mrs. Lightfoot." And after only ONE performance on stage. The editor would have been better to excise this sort of line and wait until she became notorious in a later part, and somehow reference back to the first book. Eg: a character saying, "oh and this is the notorious Mrs. Lightfoot." And hetty saying something like, "Gentle reader, this is the first time I had ever heard myself referred to as the notorious Mrs. Lightfoot and brought back the memory of when Mr.Whatshisname changed it from Miss to Mrs. when I debuted on stage. Apparently, the Mrs. stuck." Something like that would have made more sense.

The entire book is filled with this lapse in perspective.

Now to the unsatisfying, some one ripped the last chapter out of the book ending. Throughout the book, Hetty chases George to his estate, to London, and onto France. She walks into her hotel room after days of searching Calais, and but who appears? Yes, yes... George. It strains the credulity that a man no one has seen in Calais suddenly gets word that his "wife" is in Calais and looking for him. (Yeah, Yeah, I am so ready to

find out the predictable- he's a spy).

Book ends. I don't need everything to be tied up in a neat bow. I don't need it all to fit perfectly, but I need something other than, someone tore the last chapter, not page, but chapter out of a book, published it, and intended it to be incomplete.

No hook, no teaser, no NOTHING to explain George's disappearing act so I look forward to part two. Nothing that makes me what to say, "I wonder what happens?" Nothing to raise my curiosity. Nothing. Just. Ends.

Sarah Mac says

This was an enjoyable book, but not quite what I was expecting.

The first of an eventual trilogy, *Mistress of My Fate* features our narrator, Henrietta, as she describes her downfall from virtuous virgin to secretive kept woman to a highly recognizable courtesan. Something of a shy, bookish teenager, Henrietta has the misfortune of being prettier than her bitchy cousin Catherine...an error she compounds by falling for Catherine's fiance. Allenham, for his part, is a philosophical dreamer, & he returns Henrietta's feelings -- but they can't marry for financial reasons. An ill-timed death forces Henrietta to flee her uncle's house, after which Allenham takes her as mistress. When he disappears with no explanation, Henrietta follows his trail to London, where survival dictates that she's roped into the courtesan lifestyle with two very different 'keepers,' all the while continuing to pine for Allenham.

...And there it is.

The book was well-written & Henrietta has a strong, smooth voice. The plot features many historical personages & the Georgian era comes through quite clearly (as opposed to the drab wallpaper of most Regency settings). I loved the tongue-in-cheek literary references (particularly re: Samuel Richardson's moralistic melodramas & the "sublime" gothics of Ann Radcliffe) & Henrietta's self-deprecating remarks about how her female audience was too tender for the 'intimate details' of her life (though she takes great joy in sharing learned tidbits for the wisdom of uninformed young ladies).

But it's not without problems.

Firstly, there isn't enough grit (either physical or emotional). I'm aware that some readers shy away from rougher novels about prostitutes & courtesans -- so if you want a kinder, gentler approach, this one should do the trick (no pun intended). But for my part, I'd have appreciated an edgier tone. I didn't *feel* anything raw about Henrietta's passion or desperation or disgust. I had no choice but believe it, based on how she discussed the aforementioned passion, desperation, & disgust...but such a smoothly-polished veneer muffled the impact.

...Which brings me to another issue, i.e. that of the dreaded Unlikeable (and/or Unreliable) Narrator.

Henrietta is *not* an unlikeable narrator. Despite her profession & questionable choices, she's not an anti-hero. She's trustworthy, she's sympathetic, she's a classically-styled romance leading lady. What's wrong with that, you ask? Well, *I like anti-heroes*. And in this type of story -- particularly one which draws such wry comparisons between itself & the inaccuracy of Richardson -- I was expecting a less blatant protagonist. I

wanted to be MADE to care for this person, to UNCOVER what was likeable & honorable beneath a prickly, overly-scandalous exterior. Instead she seemed too good to be true -- too willing to cling to innocence, too easily labeled "the good guy" amongst the decadent lifestyle of Georgian courtesans. Her repeated bawling for Allenham grated my nerves, especially when combined with such clinging-to-twu-wuv purity of heart. In short, this is a romance novel. But I wasn't expecting a romance novel -- I was expecting *Les Liaisons*, or something akin to it.

Frankly, the lack of emotional debauchery disappointed me.

Authors, please. If your storyline allows for it, *risk the anti-hero*. Dare to offend someone by making your narrator a bitch. Force the audience to build affection for someone who isn't consistently reliable. Don't assume your readers need to have a heroine spelled out in candy-pink lettering & a glittery halo. I promise there are those who will appreciate your effort. (Hey, even Valmont had moments of endearing self-awareness. You can't convince me otherwise. :D)

This introduces my final issue -- the hero, Allenham. He was a milksop with very little personality & I couldn't understand why Henrietta was so devoted. His all-forgiving, sappy attitude seemed way too unbelievable.

3.5 stars. It was entertaining in its way, but I wish it had been less *Pamela* & more *Crimson Petal*.

Sandi *~The Pirate Wench~* says

4+ Stars

Setting: Georgian England.

Steam Factor:(Conventional lovemaking to explicit sex)

Raised in the country, orphan Henrietta Longfoot is almost unaware of her station in life as she lives with her noble cousins. But when she learns the truth of her heritage and gets caught up in a forced marriage and murder, she flees to London and naively becomes a member of the demimonde. She then falls hopelessly in love with the wrong man and then makes her way through London's gambling halls, ballrooms and yes..bedrooms becoming an integral part of a community that accepts her intelligence and unique spirit. But Henrietta is intent upon finding the love of her life, even if she has to leave London for Paris, where even more adventure awaits this feisty Heroine. If you have ever read Fanny Hill, Moll Flanders or Forever Amber (my favorite oldie) you will love this bawdy debut of a bold woman whose daring adventures will captivate you.

The story is told with rich historical detail and dialogue, coupled with witty writing and deft prose. Told in the "first-person confession" (very well done) the author and Henrietta make you feel you are really there with them and this reader didn't want it to end! Be ready to be swept away into another world, another life and another "romp" of a read with a smart and sassy heroine and every adventure she takes is a delight. I didn't know this was a 1st book in further books to come and usually I wait for the next books. But I'm really glad I read this treat and look forward to the next visit with Henrietta.
