



A Gentleman Never Keeps Score

Cat Sebastian

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Once beloved by London's fashionable elite, Hartley Sedgwick has become a recluse after a spate of salacious gossip exposed his most-private secrets. Rarely venturing from the house whose inheritance is a daily reminder of his downfall, he's captivated by the exceedingly handsome man who seeks to rob him.

Since retiring from the boxing ring, Sam Fox has made his pub, The Bell, into a haven for those in his Free Black community. But when his best friend Kate implores him to find and destroy a scandalously revealing painting of her, he agrees. Sam would do anything to protect those he loves, even if it means stealing from a wealthy gentleman. But when he encounters Hartley, he soon finds himself wanting to steal more than just a painting from the lovely, lonely man—he wants to steal his heart.

Content Warning from Author: This book includes a main character who was sexually abused in the past; abuse happens off page but is alluded to.

A Gentleman Never Keeps Score Details

Date : Published July 10th 2018 by Avon Impulse

ISBN :

Author : Cat Sebastian

Format : Kindle Edition 235 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical, M M Romance, Historical Romance, Historical Fiction, Lgbt

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Ashley says

Cat Sebastian is now six for six. Not a stinker among her published books so far (though to be fair, I haven't *loved* all of them (*Unmasked by the Marquess* was fun, but didn't hit me in my swooners).

A Gentleman Never Keeps Score, though saddled with a truly execrable cover*, features more of what I love about her books: two fully realized leads who have good chemistry, and who are kept apart not by asinine plot machinations and outside forces, but by character flaws and life circumstances and their own stubbornness. And any time there is a miscommunication between them, they quickly clear it up. How refreshing. (I will note: this was less steamy than I prefer my romance to be, but what it lacked in sexytimes, it made up for in emotional satisfaction, and the depth of the secondary characters.)

**I autobuy this author's books, so I felt no guilt about using this book as the ugly cover square on my Read Harder Challenge. Is it really so difficult to create a non-cringeworthy book cover for a m/m historical romance? The dude on the right who is supposed to be Hartley doesn't even look like he's in the same room with the dude who's supposed to be Sam (very handsome, I'll admit). And what's up with his hair? And the weird pose? I hate everything about it. It's even worse than the cover of her first book, which I didn't think could be topped. And one would THINK that having an ugly cover like this would be a deterrent for customers, and a nice cover an attractant, so what the hell, Avon?? Get it together!*

Hartley Sedgwick is the brother of Ben from the first book, and for as fluffy as Ben was, Hartley has angst and dark secrets to spare. Preyed upon in his youth by his godfather, Hartley at the time believed he was gaining favors and influence and security for his brothers by submitting to the much older man's advances, and most of him is still unwilling to believe that none of what happened was his fault, that he was taken advantage of. And now that his past has been outed and he is a social pariah, his servants quitting one by one and no one will see him socially, he still believes he deserves it.

Enter Sam Fox, ex-boxer and the proprietor of The Bell, a public house where free blacks in London congregate and socialize. An old friend of his, Kate, was also taken advantage of by Hartley's godfather, and has repeatedly refused to marry Sam's brother, Nick, though they are obviously in love, because she fears what he would think should the painting she posed for so many years ago be made public. Sam wants Kate and Nick to be happy, so he volunteers to try and track down the painting, which Kate tells him is in Hartley's house, not knowing that Hartley's godfather died years before, leaving the house to Hartley in some sort of inscrutable spiteful gesture (disinheriting his own son in the process). But instead of burgling the house, Sam instead makes the acquaintance of Hartley, and the two decide together to get the paintings back. Hartley's godfather had an entire collection of young people in the nude that he used to hang in his library, the old perv, and though Hartley's picture never hung there, he posed for one nevertheless.

Sam and Hartley are drawn to each other pretty much immediately. Sam is large and handsome and kind, which is like catnip to the kindness starved Hartley. And Hartley's obvious trauma (he can't stand to be touched) pulls at Sam's heartstrings, even as Hartley's wealth and status is a huge turn off for him. The two slowly make their way to each other, and spoiler alert, they do get a HEA.

It was satisfying to see Hartley grow so much over the course of the book, realizing that the trappings of society he clung to so hard are the very thing making him miserable. Sam grows, too, overturning his ideas about Hartley as a wealthy, spoiled, and lazy nobleman, and learning to accept help when it is offered. Sebastian navigates the racial and class issues with ease; it's never the focus, but both characters question

their own assumptions about the other, until they feel equals with one another. I also loved Sadie and Alf (Hartley's unconventional servants) and Kate and Nick (Sam's family). It's pretty clear as well that Sebastian is setting up Will (another Sedgwick brother) and Martin (the disinherited son) for the next book, for which I can't wait. Martin is closeted as hell.

And once again I find myself with no more new Cat Sebastian books to read.

Read Harder Challenge 2018: A book with a cover you hate.

Kindling Micky says

This is only my second book by Cat Sebastian, the first being a high-rater and this one being an okay read. I do love this era that she writes in and her description and detail certainly transport you to the setting and context very well.

This unlikely coupling of Hartley and Sam crosses social class and race which is the soaring strength of the book. The side characters, most of whom were Sam's family, friends and compatriots brought depth to the social differences and I enjoyed that. I felt like Hartley's life was less explored. Their circumstantial connection is believable but I found their sexual connection rather rushed. Hartley's issues were rather mysterious for some time and I just felt some anti-climatic feelings over that.

The storyline was interesting but it just didn't grab me wholly and that, coupled with not being truly engaged with the feelings between Sam and Hartley beyond sexual attraction left me feeling disengaged at a number of points in the book.

I do think this might just be a case of this didn't work for me considering my enjoyment of a previous book. I have an open mind and I intend it to take me to her previous works my friends have enjoyed.

I voluntarily read an early copy of this book.

Caz says

I've given this a B+ at AAR, so that's 4.5 stars

This second book in Cat Sebastian's *Seducing the Sedgwicks* series centres around Hartley, younger brother of Ben (hero of book one, *It Takes Two to Tumble*) whose backstory as explained in that book was both heartbreaking and intriguing. It's impossible to discuss further without entering into spoiler territory for book one, so if you haven't read it yet, but intend to and don't want to know, then stop reading this review now.

If you *have* read the previous book, then you'll no doubt recall that Hartley was just sixteen when he entered upon a sexual relationship with his wealthy godfather, Sir Humphrey Easterbrook, with the intention of giving his brothers Ben and Will the chance to have a safe, secure life. Ben never knew where the money for his and Will's school fees came from, or who purchased Will's naval commission – and it's only after Easterbrook's death and the rumours started by the man's son, that Hartley finally told his brothers the truth. Over the years spent with Easterbrook, Hartley turned himself into a gentleman of fashion and has been used to being welcomed by all – but when gossip started to circulate about the true nature of his relationship with

his godfather, he was immediately shunned. Now, he's all but a recluse, rarely leaving the expensive house left him in Easterbrook's will, and waited upon by only a couple of servants – and he expects even those to abandon him soon.

Sam Fox, publican and ex-boxer, is content with his lot running the Bell public house near Fleet Street. The pub is doing well – it's popular with servants and tradesmen both black and white, his brother, Nick, is the cook, and Nick's lady-love, Kate Bradley, a busy midwife, helps out when she can. Nick wants to marry Kate, and although she's not accepted him – yet – she's going to; but there's something she needs to clear up first. Five years earlier, a wealthy gentleman offered her a princely sum to let him paint her in the nude, and, needing money to cover her father's gambling debts, she accepted. Nick knows about it, but Kate doesn't like the idea of Nick's being hurt should the portrait resurface and engender nasty gossip. Sam says he'll ask around to see if he can find what's become of the painting – which is how come he ends up loitering outside a house in Brook Street and being mistaken for a potential housebreaker by Hartley Sedgwick late one night.

The large man hanging around the back door appears completely impervious to Hartley's sarcasm, and instead of leaving, asks if he's drunk and all but carries him into the kitchen. When Hartley's guest explains he's looking for a painting, Hartley realises immediately what sort of painting it is, but also has to admit that he has no idea what happened to Easterbrook's 'art collection', as those particular items had disappeared by the time he inherited the house. But he's determined to find out, and for the first time in months feels as though he has a purpose, even if it's to obtain revenge against a dead man.

Sam and Hartley arrange to meet again to discuss the search and compare notes – or so each tells himself, not wishing to acknowledge that his interest is more centred on the other man than on anything to do with the missing naughty pictures.

Ms. Sebastian skilfully imbues the romance between this mismatched pair with a great deal of sensuality and tenderness. Neither has had much – if any – experience of gentleness or affection when it comes to relationships; neither has experienced romantic love and Hartley, especially, has walled himself off emotionally, partly as a way of dealing with the things he's done, and now because he's wary of 'infecting' anyone he cares for with the stigma he carries. But the connection between him and Sam is strong and impossible to resist; and because of Hartley's reluctance to be touched, their sexual relationship develops in a way that is outside Sam's experience, but which he discovers he likes very much. Because of his size and his past as a boxer, Sam's previous lovers have assumed him to be violent and wanted him to be rough with them, but with Hartley, Sam realises he can take the time to give and accept the sort of warmth and caring he's never been asked for and didn't realise he needed. Hartley needs someone who can let him move at a pace he's comfortable with, and Sam is only too happy to allow him to explore his desires and to at last experience the pleasures – both in and out of bed – to be had when two people care for one another.

Unsurprisingly, Hartley's backstory is a difficult one to read about, and although Ms. Sebastian doesn't go into gratuitous detail, what she does tell us is sufficient to paint a picture (pun unintentional) of what he went through and to explain why he is so tightly controlled and on edge. He's also desperately lonely and has, for the past few years, disliked being touched, which of course makes even casual sexual encounters unsatisfying at best and impossible at worst. There's a weight of sadness about him as he contemplates a life alone which permeates the early part of the novel and provides a pertinent contrast to what we're shown of Sam's life – content, surrounded by people who love him, and yet also facing a life without long-term companionship because it's so difficult to find that special person in a world which says he can't love as he wants to.

I'm pleased to say that the major criticism I expressed about the last couple of books of Ms. Sebastian's I read – that there were so many different plotlines going on that none of them felt adequately developed – is not an issue here. The author keeps the romance between Hartley and Sam very much front and centre, and the other issues she touches upon – the racism Sam experiences on a daily basis, the crippling weight of

Hartley's shame, the inflexibility of society and the injustices practiced on the poor by the rich – are subtly and skilfully incorporated into the storyline.

A Gentleman Never Keeps Score is a touching, sexy, and gently humorous read, and I'm thoroughly intrigued by the set up for book three glimpsed at the end. The secondary characters are well-realised and I especially loved Hartley's adopted 'family' – including a three-legged dog, a former prostitute and a young woman whose family disowned her when she became pregnant out of wedlock – whose interactions with him show clearly that Hartley is far from the aloof, cold man he believes he has become. Watching him regain his sense of self and rediscover his capacity for love and affection was truly lovely, and I closed the book with a smile of my face, confident that he and Sam were in it for the long haul.

Didi says

Considering the time period, "A Gentleman Never Keeps Score" is an interesting piece as opposites attract story. Not only were Sam and Hartley were of different class, Sam was also black, a non European ethnic minority. This was liable to cause trouble not only if exposed to others, but between the men involved as stuff involving feelings clashed with gap and differences was.

Pub owner Sam Fox was a kind and sweet man. He wore his heart on his sleeves; practically went out of his way to help needy people. His first sight of Hartley prodded him into taking the beautiful and unusual gentleman under his wings. Without a doubt, Sam was the heart of the story, the kind of character that readers would love.

I thought Hartley was a bit annoying when he was first seen on "It Takes Two to Tumble." While it had been implied the "task" he had assumed for the shake of his siblings, the feat itself wasn't really divulged. It wasn't totally exposed here too, but readers would get the gist from Hart's recollection and bits and pieces thrown in the story. Readers certainly could read between the lines the horridness young Hartley suffered and what effect that experience left him. This warmed me to him a bit, as much as generosity to the less fortunate people in his life; although his insistence of keeping appearance to the extent of burying his head in the sand and ignoring his loved ones' concern got me nuts!

For all Hart's issue with men's touch and proximity, I got to applaud Sam for his patience in teaching him in intimacy. Although, that served as double-edged sword for me, too ...because: the flip side of that was the many sexual scenes ranged from mild ones then gradually developed to quite raunchy scenes. I know, I know, what's romance story without the expression of love itself. Noted, but love is also not only about sex and too much of it could be a turnoff for me.

Fortunately, Sam's typical self-restrain and caring nature more than made the combo of shortcomings and steamy scenes' excessiveness to me. I'm glad that Hart also realized - IN TIME - that he had to stop living in limbo before Sam and happiness slipped through his fingers.

There was another issue that bugged me about Hart's debacle which had to do with a certain someone (also made a brief appearance on "It Takes Two to Tumble"). For one, it left a rather lot of thing to explore for the next book of "Seducing the Sedgwicks," yet at the same I felt as if there should be more hands shown in this entry, too to heighten the plot. I'm sure the author had planned and plotted otherwise, but that's just the way I feel (the main question for me was how the heck not one, but three people!, not realizing someone there for weeks, months(!) even. That's crazy). Nevertheless, "A Gentleman Never Keeps Score" is a good addition to the series. If nothing, Sam was a good addition to the family. Hart couldn't choose any better! ;-)

Advanced copy is kindly given by the author/publisher via **Edelweiss** in exchange for an honest review.

?? Cocky™ Michaëlle ♡?? says

OMG that cover! Yes, more please...I need this naoooooww.

See my Rant Here for pre-rating.

WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

When his godfather leaves his house to him, Hartley's reputation gets banded about in less than complimentary terms. Feeling shunned, Hartley finds himself losing servants and becoming a bit of a shut-in. Sam just wants to see his brother and his friend Kate finally get married and when he learns Kate fears a scandalous painting of her becoming public knowledge, he sets out to find it for her. When Hartley and Sam meet, the spark is instant but circumstances, emotions, and life are going to give them a bumpy road.

Hartley went utterly still as he contemplated how thoroughly ruinous this was going to be for both of them.

Second in the Seducing the Sedgwicks, a series following along the Sedgwick brothers, this book focuses on Hartley, the brother who is deeply conflicted about how he sees trading sexual favors with his godfather for money to help his family. He doesn't like to be touched and has a little bit of a prickly personality. Maybe because Sam was such a strong character but Hartley didn't leap off the pages for me. He's pretty self-contained and we do get a couple scenes with two of his brothers that highlight his personality but overall, he didn't grab me.

There was no reason for Sam to be thinking of Sedgwick at all, in fact. He wasn't even that handsome unless you had a liking for fragile-looking men with fussy clothes.

Sam was the character that shone the brightest to me, he's a strong character but in the most gentle of ways. He has a similar shy, hidden aspect of his personality like Hartley, which due to their sexuality in their place and time is a necessity, but he also has rise to the front proclivity for, simply, caring. It is not an overdone martyr syndrome but no thought, generous, and loving way he makes his choices. The way he acts, responds, and encourages Hartley, is what make this story shine and will fill your heart.

And while only a fool would believe that a kitchen table supper between a rich man, a black boxer, and a three-legged dog could be the beginning of something good, maybe Sam was more foolish than he thought.

The writing showcased here is good and the ease of conversations and interactions between the main couple and secondary characters is the escape into fictional worlds above average quality that will suck you into the world. The first in the series, It Takes Two Tumble, I thought did a great job with the emotional growth in the lead's relationship, here I found that aspect lacking in the beginning. Hartley and Sam's sexual

relationship develops pretty quickly, the emotional layers were a ways behind and as a consequence, I found their romance lacking. The sexual play scenes start very early and then when they do have a more solid emotional connection, I thought their sex scene was a bit short and abrupt and didn't deliver the impact (Hartley overcoming his touch issues) I was wanting to feel. The ending did provide some wonderful simple talking between Sam and Hartley that I wish had replaced some of the earlier sex scenes as I felt this showed their attraction and closeness more.

Nobody should have that kind of power over anyone, no matter how much money they had or if they had a title in front their name.

This story is heavily about relationships, the outer story and catalyst for getting Sam and Hartley together involving paintings is made to seem important only to be casually pushed to the background for most of the story and then a little rushed importance at the end. The secondary characters are superb (love Alf, Hartley's sort of valet) and add immensely to the story and world. This is one of the more realistic fiction romances with social issues realistically playing a role. If you're looking for a lot of action or adventure, this wouldn't be it but if you want sweet and aching emotion, you'll want to dive in.

Sofia says

This left me with a warm feeling at imaging them all at the pub, warmth and family and being ourselves, free.

The series seems to be going up for me, good.

I understand where the book cover is coming from and I applaud that but I really cannot make myself like it.

Hollis says

"When you said you brought something to cheer me up, I thought maybe some boiled sweets. Not an enormous glass prick."

I've been looking forward to more of Sebastian's *Seducing the Sedgwicks* since book one came out and I don't want to say I was disappointed by Hartley's story, because I wasn't, but I guess I expected more of the kind of pure gooey delicious fluff we got in *IT TAKES TWO TO TUMBLE*. What the author offers up in *A GENTLEMAN NEVER KEEPS SCORE* is more serious, more weighted in some not so great backstory for Hartley (none of which is relived or gratuitous. and honestly if you've read the first book, it only really confirms what is implied), as well as the every day racism faced by his romantic counterpart.

"It's all right, you know."

"It really isn't."

"Not what happened to you. That'll never be alright. But you will be."

The similarity in Hartley's troubles with his reputation, and Sam's reality of always being perceived to be rough or violent because of his big boxer's build, not to mention being a black man and therefore less than the white equivalent, was an interesting parallel and I appreciated how Sebastian dug into the added element of classism and worth. There were so many juicy emotional elements at play, including some that influenced

the intimacy between these two very different men, and I liked so much of it. I liked that Sam was basically a soft cinnamon roll, that Hartley was prickly and didn't want to be touched -- physically or emotionally by those around him -- and I **loved** the supporting cast of misfits that become Hartley's family.

"You look as if you've been living. As if you've been feeling things. Your heart seems lived in."
"That sounds disgusting, Benedict."

So why I didn't **love** this book, why I set it down time after time, I don't know. I just wasn't pulled into this one the way I was the first book. It might have had something to do with a plot around missing paintings that went from being the hyper-focus point of it all.. to completely disregarded.. and then relevant again at the ending. I could've also just wanted way more Ben (book one) and was sad I didn't get it. Though meeting, and getting to know a bit about Will, the next Sedgwick on the docket, was interesting. And I'm curious to see how that story with Martin comes about.

During Hartley's visit, he had been rather startled to find his older brother smitten with another man. And one had to wonder about Will. Perhaps he'd write to Percy and Lance and see if this was a hereditary quirk of the Sedgwick constitution.

I think, stripped down to it, this was a great story. I just wish I could've **felt** it more. If I have time I think I'll try and reread this one prior to publication in the hopes that it's just my current mood skewing me towards a lower rating. Because I love this author, I love her writing, and she's written some of the best characters not only in this genre but.. ever. And I don't think any of that is missing here. But for now..

3.5 "can you trust me to keep loving you? no matter what?" stars

** I received an ARC from Edelweiss and the publisher (thank you!) in exchange for an honest review. **

Mandi Schreiner says

I don't think I've ever read Cat Sebastian and shame on me! I really enjoyed her voice in this one – she gives us two characters that will make you smile and warm your heart.

Hartley Sedgwick took London drawing rooms by storm with his good looks and easy charm. But when his godfather dies, and Hartley inherits his house, the godfather's son, who was overlooked in the inheritance, starts to release salacious gossip about Hartley – that he admires men, not women. There is 100% truth in this gossip, but thankfully the son doesn't have definite proof that would criminally prosecute Hartley. Instead, Hartley is shunned from society. He refuses to give up his house, and becomes a recluse. No matter how much his brothers try to get him out, he stewes in misery as he watches his staff leave.

Sam Fox owns the Bell, a popular pub. A former boxer, Sam decided to leave the sport when he almost killed a man, and then his protégé died in the ring. Sam is black and follows every single rule as to not draw attention to himself. He knows being black makes him a target and he doesn't want to give those with authority any reason to look at him. When his good friend Kate comes to him, upset that a nude portrait painted of her years ago, is making her nervous that it may one day expose her, he wants to help. Kate and his brother are fond of each other, but she is embarrassed that she posed nude when she was desperate for money years ago. Sam tracks this painting down to Hartley's godfather, which is how Sam is found lurking outside of Hartley's house late one night.

Hartley also was painted nude by the same artist – and he still suffers from the trauma of it all in present day. Used and abused as a young man, he can't stand anyone to touch him. When Sam is lurking outside his house, his first instinct is fear. Sam is big and unknown to him. But Sam soon soothes him and Hartley realizes this man is not a threat. The two of them decide to work together to track down the paintings, and slowly Hartley starts to trust Sam and a romance develops.

I loved Hartley and Sam so much. Hartley's spirit is broken since gossip broke that he likes men. He doesn't necessarily deny it – he acts more feminine and it's just always kind of been known that he wouldn't chase after women. But he is lonely – and with his trauma of being touched and made to pose nude years ago, it makes it a difficult existence for him. Sam comes into his life in a random moment, and changes his life forever. Sam is the kindest most adorable romance hero!! He is solid, strong man who also fights his past demons with guilt over what happened in the boxing ring. In present day, it's exhaustion from having to live his life extremely proper as to not draw police attention to the black man in town.

Sam has a brother and his best friend Kate, and together the three of them have a lovely friendship/family. And what I really liked is that throughout the book, Hartley slowly makes his own family as well. His staff left him once the gossip broke – so he had hired a ruffian kid named Alf, who becomes his valet. And then Alf finds a young pregnant society lady who was kicked out of her house, to be the cook. These two, along with Hartley and Sam, become their own little family and it's so cute and heart-warming.

The romance between Sam and Hartley starts out slowly, as Hartley can't be touched. And Sam is so patient and kind, and willing to put Hartley's needs first – and he listens to Hartley, so he is sure to not overstep his bounds. I loved them together. And let me not forget to mention the scene where Sam caresses Hartley's gloves at the pub. It's a longer scene but I'll give you a tiny taste....

Sam out to put the glove down, pour some beers, get back to his damned job. Instead he turned it over on the table, gave it one final caress, and when he handed it back to Hartley, let his fingers graze over the other man's palm.

His breath hitched, and from the other man's stillness, he thought Hartley wasn't breathing either.

A heartwarming story of friendship and love.

Grade: B+

americanwordcat says

It took me a bit to relax into this book and trust the Cat Sebastian would be able to give me a happily ever after in this queer interracial historical romance.

She does. The writing is lovely and detailed. Sam and Hart make a wonderful couple.

Hart is in crisis and has to reexamine so many things as his life is upended after he is exposed for being a kept man. He has to come to terms with the truth that through it felt like a choice to support his family, the power dynamics at play make "choice" such a complex concept.

Sam has to decide to have someone for himself.

Lines of class, race, and sexuality weave together.

The romance charming, hot, and sweet and feels possible.

The secondary characters really engaging as Hart builds new and better connections.

I would have like to know more about the Free Black community and felt that the aspects of the plot to due with Hart's brothers depended too much on the first book but overall so well written and engaging.

Anne Boleyn's Ghost says

This book. It made me teary-eyed and it made me sigh. I was a sniffing, gooey mess. **Although A Gentleman Never Keeps Score isn't my favorite Cat Sebastian book, it is deeply touching and tender.**

Since I'm on record as low-key stanning Sebastian's stories (although I'm low-key hating this cover) it is no surprise that her characters *always* affect me. **Hartley** Sedgwick may be one of the most affecting yet. Hart's dead godfather was a sexual predator who took advantage of a teenaged Hart's love for his brothers. And society, as society is wont to do, blamed the victim. I appreciated that Sebastian doesn't shy away from exploring the lasting effects of sexual abuse. **Wearing an armor of buttons, Hart is adverse to touch, unfamiliar with true pleasure, believing himself unworthy of true affection.**

That begins to change when he meets **Sam**, a black former boxer and pub owner. **While I found Hartley a prickly but sweet cinnamon roll, I found Sam the sweetest of sweet cinnamon rolls.** Sam is caring, supportive of his family and friends and community, an all-around genuinely good person. Searching for a scandalous painting of his friend, he traces it to Hartley's godfather, and the men partner to find and destroy it. **Sam just wants to help his friend. Hart just wants revenge against the man who abused him. But they get so much more.**

Sebastian's exploration of racism and classism and social stigma amid the love story is very well-done. While nursing their respective insecurities and doubts, Hart and Sam acknowledge the difficulty and danger in being together. **But they find that their love is worth the risk, and they find a way.** I adored how Sam took care of Hart, pulling him into the light and into his life, and I adored how Hart wanted to give Sam everything despite fearing that he didn't have anything to give, how he was there when Sam needed him.

Some readers found the overall evolution of the romance lacking, and I think that those findings do have some merit. The supporting characters are well-crafted and wonderful, but **the book sometimes had an ensemble feel that infringed upon the romance.** I wanted more solo interactions between Hart and Sam, more thoughts of one another, more insight into how their relationship transcended the initial physical connection, more emotional build-up. Yet they shared some utterly wonderful and warm moments, and I was so glad that such two deserving souls found each other.

I don't even care that there was a very obvious set-up for **Will and Martin** because I'm SO here for Will and Martin.

A Gentleman Never Keeps Score is a sweet and heartwarming story. I always recommend Cat Sebastian's books, and this is no different.

Chris says

Another lovely historical romance by the queen herself ! This was sweet, warm and made me smile. Sam was the kind hearted soul who took care of people around him. Being a black man who leased a pub made life challenging as the dodgy cops were always looking for trouble. Hartley was the damaged young man, shunned by society for being a degenerate but who was really a victim of abuse. Both men always looking out for others with soft hearts. They recognized this in each other and the dance of friendship began. An unlikely pair, but a beautiful one.

Richard Derus says

I quite like all the interconnectedness of these stories, and was gratified that Ben showed up despite being happily hooked up with his Phillip.

Not quite as easy for me was the nature of Hartley's problem barring him from easy intimacy with Sam. Saintly Sam got a smidge saccharine if you want to know the truth. The big problem separating them was, in the end, less resolved than treated with a massive injection of handwavium. I was in the fullness of my go-with-the-flow mood from Ben and Phillip's tale so I bobbed past that rock.

Right into the one that holed my boat and resulted in that missing star: Martin. I gather that Martin and Will are next in the series, so I will say nothing except: "Really."

anna (readingpeaches) says

This review is also posted on my blog.

I received an ARC from the publisher via Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.

2.5 ?

It's not that I was promised a slowburn with *A Gentleman Never Keeps Score*, but it is marketed as a regency era romance and there just are some things one expects from this genre. And the slowburn quality of the romance is the first on that list, the most important even.

So is *A Gentleman Never Keeps Score* a good book? Sure, it actually kind of is. And is the relationship portrayed in a good, healthy way? Yeah. But am I disappointed in how the romance was conducted? You bet.

This is a story of Hartley Sedgwick, who came into money but was ultimately shunned by polite society of London due to his preferences and a past relationship, and Sam Fox, a black man who owns a bar, is an ex-boxer and would nothing more than to keep his whole neighbourhood warm and happy. Not a duo you would imagine ever even crossing paths, and yet they make it work. They work on their problems, they mature during the events of the novel, they learn from one another... It sounds great! And yet, I still feel cheated.

Because, you see, I was expecting that excruciating slowburn that Jane Austen was so good at. I was expecting the main couple to maybe kiss once by the ¾ mark of the book. What I got instead was a sex scene 50 pages in. Nothing about this scenario says "slow". This really is my main grievance, since I just have no idea how I'm supposed to care about the characters or their relationship when it's all dialed down to blowjobs. Sex is great and all, but how about the two gay men won't jump on each other the first time they meet. How about that.

There's also the fact that as one of the main characters is a black man, the narrative focuses a lot on the issues the black community faces. Which I suppose would be a good thing, only the author is white and is that really their place to talk about this? It's one thing for white authors to have poc characters and another entirely to talk in detail about problems that aren't their own, but instead a very specific group's.

All in all, this is a weird book to review. On one hand it's actually really well written, the characters are fleshed out, the dialogues natural. On the other though, there's so much - and so soon! - focus on sex in this gay relationship, it slowly edges its way to fetishisation. Hartley might feel safe with Sam, but I don't exactly feel neither safe, nor satisfied with *A Gentleman Never Keeps Score*.

Ami says

3.75 stars rounded up

I loved the relationship build -- it felt tender and sweet. Probably because Sam Fox, despite his feature and previous job as boxer, is very patient with Hartley. I also adored the 'family of choice' that Hartley builds alongside his valet, Alf, and the cook Sadie. And there's a three-legged dog here... I should really point it out ^^.

The 'case' with the painting doesn't really go anywhere, it's pretty much buried under Hartley and Sam's relationship, and only appears once in a while when both men remember about it -- which is for me, is considered moot because 1) Nick (who wants to marry Kate) doesn't really care about the painting, 2) Kate knows Hartley, and even if the painting is there at the house, she knows Hartley will never sell it.

Oh and that 'bait' for the third book ... with (view spoiler) feels rather flimsy.
