



## Never Kiss a Rake

*Anne Stuart*

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## Never Kiss a Rake Anne Stuart

Anguished by death. Driven by revenge.

Bryony Russell and her two sisters are left destitute by the disgrace and unexpected death of their father, a wealthy shipping magnate. He left a cryptic note, and Bryony is determined to find the real villain and clear her father's name. In disguise as a servant, Bryony infiltrates the home of her father's business partner to find proof of his guilt...or innocence. It's not just clues that Bryony finds, but temptation too...

Adrian Bruton, Earl of Kilmartyn, immediately suspects there is something not quite right about his new housekeeper. The brooding, irresistible rake plays along because he has his own guilty secrets, and his venal, scheming wife holds the key to them, trapping him in a hate-filled marriage. But against his will he's fascinated by Bryony, seeing past the scars on her face to show her the beauty she never knew she had. Bryony must uncover the truth and attempt to preserve her father's legacy, before things go too far and she falls in love with a man who might very well be her worst enemy.

## Never Kiss a Rake Details

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Author : Anne Stuart

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## From Reader Review Never Kiss a Rake for online ebook

**Caz says**

**This is my review of the AUDIO version**

*Never Kiss a Rake* is the first book in a new historical trilogy from Anne Stuart which features the three Russell sisters, Bryony, Maddy, and Sophie. Their father, a renowned and wealthy financier, has died suddenly and in mysterious circumstances, leaving them destitute. Based on the scrap of a note she has found, the eldest sister, Bryony, believes her father was murdered and likely that one or more of his business partners was responsible.

You can read the rest of the review over at [AudioGals](#)

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**Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The writing is sly, sensual, humorous and firmly ensconced in the period. Even if I wasn't the biggest Anne Stuart fan on earth, I will still have found this book utterly enchanting.

I was really nervous with the storyline because I hate adultery with a burning passion. I'm happy with how things unfolded. There was no line crossing in this book that I couldn't live with. While Lord Kilmartyn is supposed to be a sleazy rake, I was completely in love with him quite early on in the book. I found him very seductive and I could see why Bryony fell for him, despite being a very sensible young woman. I liked the importance of his Irish heritage to his persona, and how it had gotten him into a shaky situation of late, but defined him in a way that he couldn't turn his back on. I wish that Ms. Stuart had delved more into where his marriage went wrong, but I got the impression that he wanted to be a good husband to his wife at some point, and he loved her, but now he hated her. In some books with the unrepentant, adulterous rake, I question the character's ability to remain faithful to the heroine, but I have no doubt that Kilmartyn would be capable of that with Bryony. His caring for her when she was in need was very touching and showed more than words.

I also loved Bryony as a character. Her pain in feeling unloved and unattractive because of her smallpox scars made sense. While it scarred her self-esteem, she was still a strong-minded person and no fainting flower in the face of her family's recent change in fortunes. I like her pluck and how her natural personality comes out in her interactions with Kilmartyn. I rooted for her to get him, and win him over in a way that didn't cross the line into adultery or illicit affair territory and I was glad Ms. Stuart gave her that happy ending with no compromise in that area.

The secondary characters are a fun addition to the book, with a little bit of the "Upstairs, Downstairs" vibe as Bryony gets engrossed in the world of the servants and they take her in, especially Mrs. Harkins the kindly chef.

I confess I read the last book before this, so I sort of know how it ends, but it didn't spoil things for me. There is still plenty of mystery in the storyline with what happened to Bryony and her sisters' father to keep the story interesting. That is if steamy romance with a soon-to-be reformed rake isn't enough to keep things exciting.

*Never Kiss a Rake* is a promising start to this newest historical romance series by Ms. Stuart. She brings all the steamy romance and engaging characters that make her books delicious reads for me. I hope to read

Never Trust a Pirate very soon.

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## **Suzanne (Under the Covers Book blog) says**

Miss Bryony Russell is determined to clear her disgraced father's name and prove that his carriage accident was no accident at all but murder. Left with only a cryptic note from her father, she decides to infiltrate the house of his business partner, Adrian Bruton, Earl of Kilmartyn, the only person who wasn't left penniless from her father's supposed fraud. But posing as his housekeeper is harder than she expected, especially when she feels a helpless attraction and connection, one he seems to reciprocate.

A wickedly sensual hero, a sensible practical heroine; I love that combination and Anne Stuart does it really well, Adrian is naughty enough to ping on the bad boy radar, but with enough sweetness in him to get us girls melting at his beautiful feet. And Bryony was great in her practical glory, and watching helplessly throw sense out the window to fall in love with the wicked Earl was fun to read. But she did all this and more a lot better in her Wicked House of Rohan series, that didn't stop me from enjoying this book though; the characters were interesting, the sexual tension and connection between Adrian and Bryony was good and Never Kiss a Rake was definitely a page turner.

What has stopped me from giving this book a higher rating even though I did like the characters, story and the writing, is that I had a sense of déjà vu whilst I was reading it. There are a lot of books like this one out there in historical romance and there was nothing about Never Kiss a Rake that stood out amongst the crowd. Like I said above her Wicked House of Rohan series has the same kind of dynamic as this book, only I felt the characters and the romance had much more depth and feeling than this did.

Anne Stuart is a fantastic writer so although I have read better before that didn't stop me from enjoying Never Kiss a Rake and it certainly won't stop me from reading the next book in this series.

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## **Duchess Nicole says**

"Oh, my love," he said softly, "you terrify me."

Oh, the wonderful world of an Anne Stuart novel...

Despite the fact that Stuart's typical ultra gamma hero was lacking a bit in his gamma-ness, this was still a fantastic story. Bryony, the heroine, is in search of the man who killed his father, stole his money, and left his daughters not only destitute, but shunned from society due to the cloud of suspicion hanging over their family name. The Earl of Kilmartyn was his business partner, and due to a multitude of reasonable conclusions, is first in line for Bryony's suspicions. She infiltrates the married Earl's household posing as a new housekeeper.

Kilmartyn is married, this is true. His wife of ten years is very nearly his only match in beauty in all of England. But her disgusting, cruel nature, and her many affairs that she parades in front of her husband have hardened him to her, and love and marriage as well.

"Well, you might not mind being surrounded by ugliness, but I do," she snapped. He was already surrounded by ugliness, the ugliness of human nature eat its worst, and he'd been chained to her for close to a decade."

Until Bryony comes along, with her pox scars and her pride, her steadfast nature, and her obvious secrets.

I loved that Kilmartyn had Bryony figured out almost from the get go. She's been secluded her entire life, a recluse by choice after her mother convinced her that her scars made her inappropriate for society. So Bryony is a bit naive, but she is SO STRONG in character. And she truly fights her attraction to the most beautiful man she has ever seen, knowing in her heart that her ugliness could never attract a man, let alone him.

"He wasn't even touching her, and yet she felt invaded, taken, seduced, and enraptured, all from the deep, piercing look that caught between them pulling her like a riptide, and she swayed toward him, wanting to feel his body against her. Her breasts were hot, there was a tight feeling in her belly, and she wanted...she wanted...she couldn't name what she wanted. She could only feel it."

It sounds very cliché, but I can't think of how else to phrase this: Kilmartyn and Bryony simply break down each other's walls. A la Anne Stuart Style...with their snooty back and forth, their obvious disdain and mistrust of one another...they constantly condescended to each other! And I had to laugh...seriously, these two and their constant sexually charged frustration was a joy to read.

"He didn't have much of a conscience left, but what remained seemed to belong to Bryony."

\* Arc courtesy of Montlake via Netgalley

\* Quotes used with permission

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## **Booklover, Indianapolis says**

(Sep) 2.5\*

I really love Anne Stuart. I think her Gamma heroes are great, her heroines usually don't annoy me, and most of what I've read I've really liked. So it pains me a bit to give this book less than stellar marks. It's not that it was bad, necessarily, it just wasn't good.

The storyline is pretty similar to a lot of her other historicals - not very pretty but strong will heroine infiltrates hero's house to try and figure out if he was involved in the mysterious ruination and subsequent death of her father. Surprisingly, Kilmartyn is not a Gamma hero at all. In fact, he's not even Alpha. He's kind of, well, milquetoast. There is nothing Rakish (title?) about him - we hear he sleeps around, but never see any evidence of his philandering ways. He's got a horrible wife who he hates (she is blackmailing him, has evidence of something he did that could get him arrested and even possibly hung for treason). However,

we only ever see them together once, never learn how he met her, fell in love with her, how she got this evidence, why she wants to stay with him when she appears to hate him too. Is it just because he is rich? Never says. There are no characters here other than the house staff (I loved the side stories that appeared in the House of Rohan series). We learn very little about Kilmartyn's life.

Bryony (hate this name!) is a woman in her late 20s who was "hidden" (sort of) by her family due to her face, which is somewhat scarred w/small pox scars. Kilmartyn, of course, barely notices these scars and feels a sexual attraction to her from their first meeting. There is a convoluted storyline about her father being accused of embezzlement from his company - this caused two (!) banks to fail, he lost everything, his family was left destitute. Kilmartyn was his business partner but somehow his shares in the company stayed intact and he lost nothing. He looked at Bryony's father as a mentor, but never once questioned why this honest man would have done this, or what happened to his beloved daughters after he died. She makes some odd choices - I'm always amazed when heroines, especially one like this who was raised to be a lady, think they can all of a sudden put on their Super-Spy hat and find evidence of a crime. She makes some really odd choices, like when she cleans up Kilmartyn's wife's room - the sign of a struggle, broken stuff everywhere, blood on the floor - but tells no one, and then later finds bloody clothes in Kilmartyn's closet and rather than leaving them or getting rid of them, she throws them out the window, figuring that she does not really believe he's guilty of harming his wife - but just in case, well, if the clothes are meant to be found they will and he'll just have to deal with the fall out. Huh?!

This book just had a slapped-together feel to it. There was no real connection between Kilmartyn and Bryony, the sex was brief and rushed. And the ending...well, what there was of an ending made no sense. The villain does not really explain who he is, why he was sleeping w/Kilmartyn's wife, why he hates Kilmartyn, how he's managed to get so much damage done. He disappears (as there are, I believe, two more books (Bryony has two sisters), I doubt very much he's dead), and Kilmartyn, who is at this point suspected in the disappearance of his wife (we know she's dead), runs away, Bryony at his side. To be continued... The biggest sin this book created, besides the weird and unfinished ending, was that it was, much as I hate to say it, well...kind of boring. I mean, it's readable, and it is Anne Stuart, and it's not as bad as Silver Falls (IMO, her worst), but it's really not very good. But, I will persevere and try the next one when it comes out in December (at least, I plan to, but who knows!).

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## **Beanbag Love says**

I had a sudden craving for historical romance and, lo and behold, an Anne Stuart trilogy was advertised on my Kindle. I decided to try it.

Now, I've only ever read one other Anne Stuart book, but I do like her writing. I think she creates improbable, but satisfying stories and I figured I'd be getting something I could at least enjoy for a few days.

I was right, but only just. The premise of the series is that three sisters – heiresses to a shipping magnate's fortune – are ruined and thrown to the mercies of the world because their father supposedly embezzled all the money from his business and then managed to kill himself in a carriage accident while trying to get away. So no one will have anything to do with them and all their money and belongings has been confiscated. The evidence against their father is thin and they want to find out who the real culprit is, restoring their standing in society and clearing their father's name.

Good premise, but the use of TSTL behavior on the parts of the heroines (and in some cases the heroes) in order to further the plot was a real problem for me.

In this first book, *Never Kiss a Rake*, the oldest sister, Bryonny manages to secure a position as housekeeper to the notorious rake, Adrian Bruton, the Earl of Kilmartyn. He's a married man and his wife is a lunatic and shrew who sleeps with most men who cross her path and who lives to make Adrian's life miserable.

Bryonny has been a recluse since she was 12-years-old due to some leftover pock marks on one side of her face. Other than that, she and her sisters are raving beauties. But Bryonny's mother was adamant that Bryonny was hideous because of the scars and no better than a burden. Which, understandable, distorted the young woman's view of herself.

The story ends well, but unresolved, which is why you must read the next book. The overriding arc of investigating the three possible villains (according to the sisters) is what ties all the stories together.

It's not bad. It's Anne Stuart, after all, but I really don't like unbelievably stupid behavior as a plot device. There are so many things that can happen organically if a little bit of thought goes into it, I just don't have patience for the making someone a moron even if it's just for one scene so the Big Event can happen. It's annoying.

I'm giving this one 4 stars, although it's more of a 3.5 – 3.75. I think some of the action could have happened in a more believable manner, but I did like the leads and I was happy for them to end up together. There was some nice dialog and Stuart writes enjoyable love scenes. And since I was craving historical romance at that time, it did hit the spot.

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## Frankie Lovely says

**2.5 stars**

**In a Word:** Decent

**This book is Free on Kindle Unlimited**

This is not really a genre that I have a lot of experience in reading and reviewing so bear with me. Let's face it, I think we all sort of expect these things to be cliché as f\*ck, and this book was really no exception. It was a quick read and a fun story with some major drags and pretty much everything one would expect.

### What I liked

Bryony Russell is a decent heroine (with one dominant complaint listed later on in this review). She is strong and clever and tough as nails. She is also a little insecure, a little aloof at times, and she definitely thinks she's sneakier than she actually is which makes for some very fun moments in this book.

Speaking of flaws, no one is more flawed than our very own "rake", Adrian Bruton, Earl of Kilmartyn. He is your quintessential "hot guy with a bad attitude", and to be honest, I not-so-secretly love the "bad boy who becomes good for a girl" trope. This book of course throws down with the uber cliché on this front and ... I'm totally cool with it.

The chemistry and banter between our two MCs was really fun and enjoyable and exactly what I came for.

### What I did *not* like

I swear if I had to hear about how "ugly" Bryony was because of a few pock marks on her cheek (despite the

fact that every man she came in contact with thought she was "gorgeous") I was going to lose my freaking mind!!! While I liked her character for the most part, she was definitely the cliché "unwanted spinster who is gorgeous and single for no determinate reason". Let's call her Sally Spinster shall me. But again, I knew this was going to be a pile of clichés to begin with so I have no one to blame but myself.

Ok so let's face it. I was here for one thing and one thing only. The hot sex. Yeah, I said it. And there was sex ... and it was hot ... and I would have appreciated more of it but whatever.

Where we fell off the wagon here was when this book tried to be about more than romance and, in my opinion, failed.

The whole murder mystery aspect of this book fell super flat for me. I really just wanted more silly moments and sexy moments (because these moments were fantastic really). Once the story started to veer from the romance and into the mystery, I lost interest almost completely. The plot twists were all predictable, the suspense was not suspenseful and the mystery was not very exciting at all. Luckily the hot chemistry and funny banter between our main characters was entertaining enough to carry this story through and make this read a decent one overall.

### **In Conclusion**

This book was a quick, easy and fun read. Not groundbreaking literature by any means but decent enough for a nice rainy day.

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## **Lelyana's Reviews says**

### **Buddy read with Dhini and Funzee**

#### **Adrian, Earl of Kilmartyn**

He's a passionate, sexy like hell Irish man, but he's having the most unhappy marriage. With the most beautiful Lady in London as a wife, he should be happy, but yet, he felt trapped with a loveless, unfaithful, bitchy wife for 10 years!

Until he met his pretend housekeeper, Bryony!  
And the spark begin, the fire between them they can not resist.

*She tasted of the redemption he could never have, the fiery hell he was heading for. She tasted of everything he had ever wanted...*

*He needed Bryony, nothing but Bryony, breathing her, taking her, drowning in her.*

I loved the spark and chemistry between them. I loved how Adrian tried to pursue Bryony to have him. Bryony is a brave and strong girl, she knew what she wanted. And she wanted Adrian.

But then, Adrian was a married man, even his wife was an evil and parade her lovers in front of him, he's a gentleman.

But there's secrets...lots of secrets they're keep from each other. Starting with Bryony's father's death, unfinished business, jealous business partner and also Adrian's wife's secret.

Bryony suspected Adrian had something to do with her father's murder. Was he a murderer? And why did Bryony still didn't believe him until almost the end of the book, and why at the same time she was so eager to protect adrian from whatever secret he's been hiding?

And what. did Adrian. do to earn Bryony's trust?

I loved the story...but the ending was sooooo annoying... **the secret reminds still.**

Niw I can't patiently wait for the second installment !

Rcommended.

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### **Jacob Proffitt says**

This was a pretty by-the-numbers Victorian romance with most of the roles going as you'd expect. The not-yet-thirty virgin enters the house of someone she suspects of ruining her father—someone titled, rich, and world weary. Naturally, sparks ensue. And intrigue. All the latent trust issues spark about and, of course, the two are inevitably drawn together in the end.

Add a plot that was, at best, serviceable and you have a book that meets expectations without really trying for better. The biggest weakness of the book was actually the villain. He was murky and his competence (and lucidity) faded in and out rather conveniently. (view spoiler)

Still, it's well-written enough and it *did* engage my interest right to the end. I suppose I just liked Bryony and was more than willing to see her find happiness.

**A note about Steamy:** On the high side, for all there weren't that many explicit scenes. They were, however, long and there was enough innuendo, playing around, and frank talk to make sex permeate the book somewhat. Bonus points, however, for giving virginity the weight it deserves and for not simply ignoring potential pregnancy (on screen, anyway).

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### **Fangirl Musings says**

DOWN & DIRTY QUICKIE REVIEW!

#### **One Sentence Summary:**

She's his scarred, dumb-ass housekeeper spy & he's a married, rich dip-shit.

**Name That Trope:**

- \* Everybody's Too Stupid To Live
- \* Sense, Mother Fucker, DO YOU MAKE IT?!
- \* "I think he's a cold blooded murderer but he's soooooooooOoooo sexy!"

**What part made you fangirl squeal:**

The part where my ass got to turn the last page.

**Favorite Character:**

Any character not in this book! Okay, fiiiiiiiiine. I guess the cat. Wait. Was there a cat? I think there was a cat??? There should have been a cat.

**How smexy was the smex?**

SUPER HAWT! Like, OH-MY-GOD HOT 'CAUSE HERO'S THAT DON'T RESPECT CONSENT ARE SoooOOOOoOOo SEXY... -\_-

**Whose Line Is It Anyway:**

*Mr Asshole:* You're going to say yes.

*Miss Dumbass:* No, I wont.

*Mr Asshole:* Yes, you will. Because you want me just as much as I want you. Your mouth may be full of lies but your body betrays you.

**Got any bitching to do?**

Brace yourself, this is gonna get ranty!

- 1) She's investigating hero for her father's death, his wife ends up murdered, & she CONSTANTLY flips between trusting & not trusting the hero with literally no proof or anecdotal evidence aside from her gut!!!!!!?!?!?!?!?
- 2) The whole book: "I think he's a bad guy. He doesn't think my smallpox scars are ugly. He wants to bang me. We banged. There's a bad guy. Love? WHOOP THERE IT IS!"
- 3) All this mofo ever does is try to sex up our girl. That's it. Nothing else. No deep conversations. No getting to know her. Just, "ME WANNA PUT MY SAUSAGE IN YOUR BATTER!"
- 4) Consent issues. Consent issues for days & days & man I wanna chop his mini-me off with a spoon.

**Visually Depict Yo Book Feels:**

**Famous last words:**

No, the hero never sexually assaults the heroine but he literally pulls the “*no means yes*” card. No, the story isn't RAGE inducingly bad, but a lot of it's potential legit went nowhere. And no, the romance ain't romantic; the love came outta nowhere! The 3rd arc rushes the badguy conflict resolution, the sex is shoved in at the last minute, the plotting was pathetic, the characters were weak AND THIS BOOK IS NO!

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For a more in depth, LOL-fest discussion on romance novels and romance Asian dramas, [HERE BE MY YOUTUBE CHANNEL](#):

<https://www.youtube.com/fangirlmusings>

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### **Crista says**

Anne Stuart is in a league all her own, so when reading a book written by her, it almost requires it's own rating system. *Never Kiss A Rake*, while certainly not her best work, is still written by this master storyteller and therefore is still well worth your time and money.

*Never Kiss a Rake* is the first book in the highly anticipated trilogy featuring the Russell sisters. Their father has been accused of stealing money from the company that he had part ownership of. A shadow of shame has been cast upon their family name and their father has recently been killed in a suspicious carriage accident. The girls all believe that their father was killed and framed for illegal money laundering. The eldest, Bryony, goes under cover as a servant in Adrian Bruton, the Earl of Kilmartyn's household in order to uncover the truth about her father. Adrian was part owner of the company and his shares in the company have mysteriously been untouched by the laundering. He is the prime suspect and Bryony believes him to be guilty of murder and theft.

Anne Stuart's are legendary, and Adrian Bruton does not disappoint. He follows the tried and true Stuart formula of witty, slightly dangerous, and unrepentant heroes, and rescues this otherwise mediocre novel.

Interestingly, what's different about this book is that Adrian is married. Although his wife is a terrible person and the marriage is really in name only, this fact did provide some practical challenges to the romance between Adrian and Bryony. Thankfully this is short lived, and this tension is quickly resolved. For those opposed to “cheating themes”, I don't think this book will bother most people. Adrian's wife is truly evil.

I wish I would've loved Bryony more than I did. Her character just grated on my nerves. She was scarred from small pox and is constantly bringing this fact up. I felt compassion for her poor self-image (at first), but after awhile it became a character flaw. She is unconvincing as a servant and I wasn't really sure what Adrian saw in her (and this fact had NOTHING to do with her scars!)

This book has a little bit of everything: suspense, action, romance, and mystery. It sets up the next book perfectly and the next sister gets paired with a dangerous pirate (lucky girl)!

Like I said, although this is no where near Anne Stuart's best work, it is still entertaining, and meeting the delicious Adrian Bruton is well worth putting up with the slightly annoying Bryony Russell.

4 stars

## Keri says

2.5 Stars. Now going into this review I want to say I have nothing but mad love for Anne Stuart and some of my most treasured books in my collection have her name on them. But I didn't love this book and I really wanted to. I didn't think that Bryony or Aiden were particularly likable characters. Bryony, more for her attitude about her pox scars and how it affected her perception of herself. I mean, I felt that drug on too long in the book. Aiden, who is married btw, for his part was a one dimensional rake. Through most of the book, he looked at Bryony as nothing more than someone to play games with and good for a tup, because he was a rake and that is what rakes do. Then when he had his epiphany about Bryony's dad and what a mentor he was and how honest he was, but prior to that he fully believed that her dad did the deed. Never even gave a thought about his mentor or his three girls. Huh??? I could never understand how two banks folded trying to support this embezzlement scheme, but yet Aiden's stock was never affected, but yet he was a partner??? Double huh??? Then his guilt about something that he supported in Ireland, but in the end turned out to cause some deaths. Well were you sending support and help to the families you impacted? I understand feeling guilty, but what were you doing to bely the guilt, just whining about it. Then how his wife blackmailed him into marrying her because of it. I didn't have enough context to be able to get an understanding on how that happened.

Then his dealing with Bryony once he magically put it altogether in his head about who she was. He was constantly back and forth, I should play the good guy, but she is alone and no one will know and I can buy her off ...on and on. (This only reinforced that I didn't care for him.) The marriage aspect was just a small part of the book and Aiden's wife was so darn mean, I wanted to kill her myself. I warmed up to Bryony eventually, but I never bought into the love angle. It just wasn't there for me. Yes, for the most part Aiden did the right thing, but it wasn't because he really wanted to. I also hated the paperback format, but that had no impact to my rating. The ending is a bit odd, but this is going to be a story arc that will span all three books, so I expected it. Having said all of this, I still intend to get the next book in the series but I sure hope this was just first book, first series syndrome.

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## Robin (Bridge Four) says

Anne Stuart has become my go to for a quick romantic read. I like other novels in this genre but most of the books I've read by Stuart have been roughly 250 pages. Just enough for me to get to know the characters, have a little fun with the story, indulge in a sex scene or two and then move along without too much filler and fluff to spoil my appetite.

Bryony is the eldest daughter of three in the Russel family. After the disgrace and death of their father who is thought to have stolen money from some of his investors they are left with practically nothing. But Bryony isn't one to just sit back. She has decided to take matters into her own hands and try to find the man truly responsible for such deeds. She goes into service for Kilmartyn one of the suspects hoping to find proof. However she finds she is in a little over her head.

Kilmartyn, married the wrong woman ten years ago and has regretted it more many years since. She has used his one secret against him to make his life miserable while she has dalliances with many men on the side.

*"I miss you in my bed."*

*"You surprise me, my love. There are usually so many occupying it that I wouldn't have*

*thought you'd notice." The retort wasn't a wise move on his part, but there were times he couldn't resist.*

When Bryony enters his employ he catches on right away she isn't just the housekeeper she claims to be but is a spy. Although he thinks she is spying for different reasons. Kilmartyn starts to take great joy from his interactions with her trying to ferret out just why she is there. But once the game between them starts he isn't sure he wants it to end.

*She looked up at him, all stubborn defiance. She was a charming woman but a terrible spy. Didn't she know her best bet was to encourage his advances instead of trying to drive him away? She was much more likely to ferret out his secrets by curling up next to him.*

It is an intriguing and tangled mess that is funny and sweet at times.

As the sexual tension between Bryony and Kilmartyn grew I liked the play on words between them. I even liked the unusual way they looked out for each other even though they really didn't trust one another.

*Unfortunately the stove wasn't hot enough, and I gave in to temptation. I realize it was unpardonable, but—"*  
*"Oh, I rather like the idea of you giving into temptation.*

The writing in this flows and I really enjoyed most of it but I'm going to say that had I simply read the book I probably would only give it 3 stars HOWEVER I purchased the accompanying audio at the same time and there was something about the narrator's performance of the characters that increased my enjoyment of this story immensely.

Xe Sands did an incredible job of narrating the story and I do believe she sold it to me. Sands voice portrayal of Kilmartyn was perfect for me and I was complete in her thrall every time she was that character. I don't believe I've ever been so turned on by a female narrator. The slow Irish brogue she chose for Kilmartyn was better than anything I would have thought up in my own head.

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## Dabney says

this review was originally published at Dear Author

Dear Ms. Stuart:

In 2010, you released two enjoyable historical romances in your *The House of Rohan* series (*not to be confused with the Kings of Rohan*). The two books, **Reckless** and **Ruthless**, featured classic Stuart heroes: gorgeous, sexy men with power and wealth who nefariously seduce spinster heroines whom they then fall deeply, irrevocably in love with. My favorite of the two *Rohan* books is **Reckless** whose hero, Adrian, is a sinfully magnetic rake. Now, in the mid 1800's Adrian was not a common name for men. I am thus baffled you, in **Never Kiss a Rake**, named the hero of this novel Adrian too. The only answer I can come up with is that **Never Kiss a Rake** is a rehash of names, personalities, plot, and prose from your earlier books. If there's an original thing in this book--other than the heroine having had small pox as a child--I missed it.

The heroine of this book, Bryony Russell, has been left penniless by her ostensibly feckless father. Bryony (like Elinor Harriman, the cranky heroine of **Ruthless**) is responsible for her sisters (one of whom is gorgeous just like Lydia in **Ruthless**). Bryony is convinced that her father, in the weeks before his death, was swindled then murdered by one of his investors. She leaves her sisters with their kindly elderly Nanny (there's one of these in **Ruthless** too) and gets herself hired as the housekeeper in the house of one such investor, Adrian Bruton, Earl of Kilmartyn.

Adrian Bruton is a notorious womanizer with a faithless, evil wife whom he stays married to under the threat of blackmail. He's a celebrated Cyprian who drinks far more than he should, is seemingly self-indulgent, and has few compunctions about going after what he wants. (Are there any guilt-stricken Stuart heroes?) Like Adrian the first, he's gorgeous, tall, graceful, with a full mouth and bright eyes. From the moment he sees Bryony, he considers seducing her--like many a Stuart hero, her primness strikes him as wildly erotic. She's calling herself Mrs. Greaves, but he's sure there's never been a Mr. Greaves and that she's untouched. She's prickly--her personality reminds me greatly of the heroine of **Ruthless**--and Adrian decides to mess with her just because he can.

Bryony moves in Adrian's household and, despite being from the upper class, not only pulls off being a housekeeper but does a ridiculously good job at it as well. The servants--the ones she doesn't fire--all come to love her and work to protect her from both Adrian's dissolute charms and from the nastiness of Cecily, Lady Kilmartyn.

When Bryony is not scrubbing, polishing, cleaning, or supervising, she's obsessing over Adrian.

Is he her father's betrayer? Why does he put up with his witch of a wife? What would his lips feel like if she stole a kiss from his beautiful mouth when he's passed out drunk (answer: firm and with a hint of the "*smoky flavor of the whiskey*")? Why did he use the word "*orgasmic*" to describe the way she eats and what does that word mean anyway? And what on earth would happen if she accidentally on-purpose wandered in to his bed one night and, horrors of horrors, he was in it? And he was naked?

"Are you going to rape me?"

"Of course not. I wouldn't have to. I could have you eating out of my hand if I set my mind to it."

She ground her teeth. "I am not a virgin, I am not puritanical, we are not going to have any kind of . . . carnal debauchery at all. Now let me up."

He didn't laugh at her this time. He fell back against the mattress with a weary sigh, still holding on to her wrist. "Now that's the damnable problem, my angel. I'm all set to play the villain, have my disgusting, delicious way with you to both your pleasure and mine, and you say something completely adorable like 'carnal debauchery.' How is a man to react to something like that?"

"He's supposed to release me."

"I ought to," he said. "If I had any scrap of decency left in me." He turned his face, and she could see him in the shaft of moonlight, his skin white gold. It was then she realized he wasn't wearing a shirt. Realized that he wasn't wearing anything at all. "Fortunately," he added, "any decency is long gone." And he pulled her over on top of him.

"If you keep this up I'm going to get dizzy." This time she managed a satisfactorily dry, cautious tone.

He put his lips to her ear, and she could feel his hot breath against her skin. "You already are dizzy, my dear Miss Greaves. Your heart is pounding, your pulses are racing, and your nipples

are hard. I'm willing to bet my sweet little virgin is wet."

She frowned, ignoring the nipple part. "Wet?"

"Between your legs. It's a sign of arousal, your body readying itself for mine."

"That's disgusting."

Well, the sex isn't disgusting but it's prosaic. It's possible I've read too many Anne Stuart novels but I feel sure I've read every sex scene in this book before. Adrian's a god in bed who, even as he murmurs he shouldn't, takes her virginity and teaches her the joys of one or two Latin terms. Bryony needs loads of reassurance her flaws (a slightly pockmarked side of her face and lack of familiarity with male anatomy) don't make her unworthy of his ministrations. Even as she moans beneath him, she wonders if he's a murderer. (I can think of at least eight Stuart heroines who've quivered and questioned in the same way.)

It's annoying to spend so much time reading about Bryony's fears about Adrian because there's no suspense whatsoever about whom the big bad really is. And, if you've read the heroine in danger scene at the end of **Reckless**, you've more or less read the heroine in danger scene at the end of **Never Kiss a Rake**.

I like many of Anne Stuart's novels. I like some of her books that are obviously derivative of other Stuart works. The entire *Ice* series shares many similarities none of which kept me from enjoying (most of) them. **Never Kiss a Rake** is, however, derivative *and* dull. The former characteristic highlights the latter. In the hands of a weaker writer, this book would have gotten a D from me. Ms. Stuart writes well, however, and her prose is smooth and assured. I'm going with a C-.

Dabney

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## Caz says

### Updated 2 Oct 2013 to include link to separate review at All About Romance

*Never Kiss a Rake* is the first book in a new historical trilogy from Anne Stuart which features the three Russell sisters, Bryony, Maddy and Sophie.

Their father, a renowned and wealthy financier, has died suddenly and in mysterious circumstances, leaving them destitute. Based on the scrap of a note she has found, the eldest sister, Bryony, believes her father was murdered and that it is likely that one or more of his business partners was responsible.

Determined to find out the truth, Bryony decides that the best way to ferret out the information she needs is to infiltrate the households of these men – among whom are the privateer Captain Morgan and Adrian Bruton, Earl of Kilmartyn and to that end, she secures herself an interview in the Earl's household, where there is a housekeeper's position available.

She is interviewed by the beautiful and pampered Countess of Kilmartyn, who is about to dismiss her when her husband intervenes and Bryony is hired.

Kilmartyn is widely known to be a rake of the worst sort and seducer of beautiful women. His relationship with his wife is acrimonious to say the least – their mutual hatred is palpable. But Cecily has some dirt on Adrian which she is using to blackmail him and prevent his leaving her. She might not want him and in fact has a string of lovers – but she doesn't want anyone else to have him, either.

Kilmartyn is immediately intrigued by Bryony, sensing that she is not at all what she seems, and his conversation is liberally peppered with sexual innuendo, partly in an attempt to unsettle her into revealing her true purpose in his house, and partly because he really does want to take her to bed.

He's one of those intensely masculine heroes that it could be easy to dislike because he's so confident about his ability to seduce the woman he wants ... and yet he's ridiculously attractive. As a Goodreads friend commented to me – "ain't no badder boy than an Anne Stuart bad-boy", and I can certainly agree with that!

Bryony has spent the majority of her life living apart from society, believing herself to be highly unattractive because of the scars she bears as the result of a childhood illness. Her mother called her ugly and all but rejected her, so Bryony has grown up believing that no man could ever want her, the story put about in society being that she is a reclusive invalid. But in reality, her scars are nowhere near as bad as she thinks:

The scars on her face really were a trifle – he'd seen worse on aristocrats who'd suffered from a surfeit of spots when they were young.

and they don't bother Kilmartyn in the least; he finds the idea that she has no idea as to how attractive she truly is makes her even more appealing.

The book bristles with sexual tension as Bryony battles her attraction to her gorgeous employer while trying to find evidence of his involvement of financial wrong-doing and her father's murder – and simultaneously hoping to discover he had nothing to do with any of it.

But there are weaknesses, too. The identity of the villain is fairly obvious from the outset, although to be fair,

we don't discover the reasons for his actions, and I suspect these will not be revealed until the final book. I thought the final third of the book, in which Bryony and Kilmartyn begin – individually – to suspect that Cecily has been murdered was a little weak and not as tightly written as the rest of the story.

On the positive side, the two protagonists are well-drawn and engaging, even if I found Bryony's inability to trust Adrian and believe that he did truly want her until the last possible minute became rather annoying. (Even when they're finally in bed together, she tells him she doesn't trust him – but makes love with him anyway.) Adrian is rather delicious, even though he does remind me of a few of Ms Stuart's other historical heroes – but I can forgive that because of the way he is so desperate to protect Bryony even as he's proclaiming himself to be an immoral bastard.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Never Kiss a Rake* and am looking forward to reading the remaining books in the series. The pacing is good, the writing excellent and the sexually-charged banter between Bryony and Kilmartyn was a delight.

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