



The Betrayal of the Blood Lily

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The heroines of Lauren Willig's bestselling Pink Carnation series have engaged in espionage all over nineteenth-century Europe. In the sixth stand-alone volume, our fair English heroine travels to India, where she finds freedom--and risk--more exciting than she ever imagined.

Everyone warned Miss Penelope Deveraux that her unruly behavior would land her in disgrace someday. She never imagined she'd be whisked off to India to give the scandal of her hasty marriage time to die down. As Lady Frederick Staines waits, Penelope plunges into the treacherous waters of the court of the Nizam of Hyderabad, where no one is quite what they seem--even her husband. In a strange country, where elaborate court dress masks even more elaborate intrigues and a dangerous spy called the Marigold leaves venomous cobras as his calling card, there is only one person Penelope can trust...

Captain Alex Reid has better things to do than play nursemaid to a pair of aristocrats. Or so he thinks--until Lady Frederick Staines out-shoots, out-rides, and out-swims every man in the camp. She also has an uncanny ability to draw out the deadly plans of the Marigold and put herself in harm's way. With danger looming from local warlords, treacherous court officials, and French spies, Alex realizes that an alliance with Lady Staines just might be the only thing standing in the way of a plot designed to rock the very foundations of the British Empire...

The Betrayal of the Blood Lily Details

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From Reader Review The Betrayal of the Blood Lily for online ebook

Adriana says

A fantastic mix of historical romance and spy thriller with a bit of contemporary chick-lit mixed in. The story is lightly about a modern American woman studying in London as she looks for resources for her dissertation on female spies in the Napoleonic wars; she ends up finding a note about a woman whose adventure takes place in India and thus is the historical romance/thriller interwoven into a contemporary story. The parts that take place in modern times felt a bit forced at times (particularly when they cut into the engrossing historical plot), but I loved the historical part so much that I can forgive that. I particularly appreciate that you can read it and understand everything despite it being book 6 in a series. It might as well be a stand alone volume.

Lady Knight says

I was very excited to finally receive the latest installment in the Pink Carnation series, and started reading with great relish. I was, however, greatly disappointed with "Betrayal of the Blood Lily".

I loved the change in setting! I thought India was a wonderfully exotic, and yet familiar thanks to the British presence at the time. It also seemed to suit Penelope better than the stiff and formal balls and drawing rooms of England. I loved the characters of Penelope (who, even in the past books, have always liked) and Alex, and I was intrigued about how Willig would deal with the fact that her heroine this time around was already married (unhappily) at the beginning of the story. What I didn't expect is that a major subplot would be adultery. Granted, given the write-up on the front flap, I did expect that Pen and Alex would get together, but I at least thought that Freddy would be dead first.

While spies are still involved (this time it is the dreaded Marigold), they are very much in the minority of the plot. While definitely more in evidence than in the previous volume, they are still not as critical to the plot as in "Secret History of the Pink Carnation" or "The Masque of the Black Tulip".

The continuing story of Eloise and Colin was also on the weak side and revolved around Eloise chaffing at Serena's always being a third wheel to her and Colin and having to spend Valentines Day at an event that supported Serena's Art Gallery, rather than alone with Colin. However all of the material about Colin's mother and stepfather was quite interesting and I'm looking forward to hearing much more about it in the next volume.

Suffice it to say, I was not too impressed with this installment of the beloved series. It definitely had its moments, but overall I was disappointed.

Miriam says

Another fluffy installment in Willig's formulaic series of semi-sympathetic lovers battling French spies during the Napoleonic wars. The basic concept is that following the successes of the The Scarlet Pimpernel a bunch of other English aristocrats also took floral code names and skulked around defeating the Froggies. In

this instance the story is set in India and the espionage plot is rather minimal. Penelope is newly and unhappily married to jackass Freddy and, bored with her neglectful husband, decides to entertain herself by searching for some of those nasty French spies she heard about from her girlfriends (one wonders if any of these people ever keep any secrets). Mostly she alternately flirts and quarrels with English officers. I gather Penelope has appeared at least in passing in previous volumes, but I don't recollect her. Likewise, when her friend Charlotte shows up late in the book I couldn't remember her, either, despite her having been the protagonist of the previous book, which I read less than a year ago. She was one of the soggy heroines, and these books are awfully similar...

The main thing that stood out in this one was that in the frame narrative of Eloise, the grad student researching these spies, more relatives of her boyfriend Colin are introduced. Oh and just as a minor point of complaint: I didn't catch anyone using the titular codename. What's up with that?

Annemarie Donahue says

Thank god it's over! I honestly did think I'd make it through this one. What possesses me to pick these books up and read them? Oh, yeah. I'm not actually reading them. I'm listening to them as I'm trapped in my car for 3 hours as a commute to work. Really love teaching at my school but if it could just magically be closer... Well, back to the book, with the turn of each page... er.. CD, the story got worse. It begins with the protagonist Penelope pushed into a hasty marriage to the completely useless Lord Fredrick Staines (I'm certain the last name was entirely intentional!) and shipped off to India. She was a bad girl. In real life I actually rather like the "bad girl" characters. They keep the coffee clutches interesting... in literature we always find out that she's not really bad, just misunderstood and sure enough... she's just misunderstood. (READ: BORING) She causes trouble with her fictitious flirtations and after beginning a tumultuous romance with Captain Reed (who the reader could see coming from a mile away) her husband dies (he just couldn't take being in this book anymore). Well, right is rewarded, honor is maintained, evil vanquished the book ended. That last part made me happy. Go ahead, read it, I dare you.

Rebecca says

This was my last audiobook for the year--I finished it Wednesday and school finished Saturday. I get a huge kick out of Willig's books, as they seem like novels my sister and I would've written in our early teens, when we devoured huge stacks of Georgette Heyer and Elswyth Thane and the like. This one, however, goes a bit too far in suspending our disbelief.

The main character, Penelope, is pretty unlikable. We only know her as being bitter and self-pitying, and we never get to see a more endearing side. Her willingness to have an affair while married was something I had real trouble overcoming--especially since her lover had the same trouble, and then suddenly had no trouble at all. Since part of Pen's husband's lack of appeal was his lack of fidelity, wouldn't the author expect us to dislike both Penelope AND Alex as well, since they disport themselves (in some thoroughly described scenes. . . cringe. . . one drawback of audiobooks!) for four days in the same way the despised husband does?

The big strike against the book, however, is that it is marginally historical fiction, but this time Willig casts all historical accuracy to the winds. In a country where servants were expected and everywhere, Alex and Penelope slip out to travel for four days without any--not even a faithful groom or a valet. Penelope, pampered since birth, seems to be fully capable of dressing and taking care of herself, and there seems to be no question raised by the idea that these two would travel unaccompanied. Add to that the fact that they seem

to function extremely well on maybe two hours of sleep for days on end--no one ever collapses and sleeps like the drugged for two days, which seems cheating to me--and that the heat has no effect on either of them, and you get a story that had me wincing and saying, "Yes, but. . .!!!" much more than I should've been.

Usually, Willig's deft humor and historical detail make her stories something my sister and I couldn't have written at age 13 and 15. The Betrayal of the Blood Lily, however, we could have.

Krystal says

Willig never fails to deliver. Clever, fast-paced, and funny, her plots and characters always entertain. Lady Penelope Staines nee Devereaux has to be one of my favorites from her in a while though. One has to love a strong and opinionated heroine who also happens to be a good shot. Charlotte is nice and all and Mary prickly but Penelope is the sort of character you root for in a book because not only do we get to see the front she presents to the world but also her personal thoughts where she knows what she's doing is just a front.

I also like a book that makes me have a lot of questions in the end and I spent enough time trying to sort out India in the early 1800s after I finished reading than I thought I would.

My one criticism, and it's a small one really, is there doesn't seem to be an obvious place to go next. Usually we at least know where the next story will take place. But it felt like Eloise has taken this odd path out of the way and now doesn't have the next place to go...I'm worried about her dissertation if she isn't!

PS - I hope to be seeing more of Jack - characters like him and Vaughn are fun because you're never quite sure who's side they are on...

Adite says

This historical fiction, set in 19th century India, has all the ingredients of an intrigue-filled adventure-romance. The author provides authentic insights into the politics of the times and sweeps us right into the durbar of the Nizam of Hyderabad and gives us a feel of Begum Johnson's lavish parties in Calcutta.

There is a contemporary angle to the story as well. The protagonist of the modern times is an American researcher, Eloise, whose history project takes her to England where she meets Colin even as she delves into the life and times of Lady Penelope Staines and her troubled relationship with her husband Lord Frederick Staines. The story flits between Penelope and Eloise's lives.

Penelope is by far the most interesting character who clearly has a mind of her own and an acerbic tongue to match. Her impulsive nature, which causes her much grief in upper crust English society, also lands her in trouble when she accompanies her husband to India. Soon she finds herself matching wits with the Nizam's wily prime minister, chasing a French spy who goes by the name of Marigold, besides falling in love with the straight as an arrow Captain Reid.

The only drawback in this well-researched and beautifully written story of adventure and romance is the contemporary thread which doesn't quite add much to the narrative and could have been easily done away with. I do hope the author will write a book about Captain Reid's half-brother, Jack, who is modelled on the real-life persona of Anglo-Indian mercenary Colonel James Skinner. Looking forward to reading more of Lauren Willig's work.

Nicole says

I filed this under "frothy romance," but there's really nothing frothy about this. Willig goes very dark for this story of Penelope and how she finally finds love. This may be the best Pink Carnation book to date.

The thing I most like about Willig's series as it continues is that each story has a very different tone depending on the main characters. While some are romps (The Mischief of the Mistletoe is the prime example in this category), others are much more serious, such as this one and Crimson Rose.

Penelope has always been somewhat thorny and abrasive; this book allows us to see things through her eyes and understand why she is the way she is. As she journeys through India with a truly terrible husband who is spending the way through her dowry, one is left to wonder: how many women found themselves in this situation? Could they ever find a level of freedom? And how on earth did they survive wearing wool dresses during the summer in India?

Alex Reid, our hero, has a life that similarly reveal the world of complexities that Indian-born British colonists had to navigate, and his family life showed the many difficulties faced by the mixed-heritage children of colonists. Willig made Alex's dilemmas accessible and easy to empathize with.

The mystery was not predictable; I was not even sure who the villain was until the scene in which he's revealed. Willig also adds in several characters who would be worthy of books of their own, including Alex's younger half-brother.

There's a cut scene between Alex and Charlotte's husband (the Duke of Dovedale) on the website that I really wish had been in the book; it establishes that they knew each other and gives more perspective on Penelope.

I rolled my eyes at the Colin and Eloise bits; it didn't seem very intriguing at the time. But it all pays off in "The Orchid Affair."

At the end of this book, I found that I wanted to read more of Alex and Penelope's adventures, and more about the people that surrounded them in India. I hope that Willig finds a way to revisit them.

Jackie says

While I'm rating this one 2 stars, it's more like a "meh" than an 'it's okay'. To clarify, that amounts to about a 1.5 star. Anyway, I just think Willig should have stopped the series at The Seduction of the Crimson Rose (#4). I felt like The Temptation of the Night Jasmine (#5) was rather pointless. It only served to bring the Hell Fire Club into existence so that Willig could continue the mystery plotline in the rest of the series. However, this story line has fallen by the wayside. I feel like Willig is just stretching at this point.

Also, the modern story with Eloise and Collin continues to irk me. As I predicted in my Temptation of the Night Jasmine review the progress on the relationship is inching forward. Eloise has become more meddling by playing matchmaker for Serena and delving further into Colin's family and his career. Her constant reminders that Colin is her boyfriend made me want to bitchslap her. Her commentary and constant musings made me want to double that bitchslap. So yeah, she's not my favorite character as this point, which is a shame considering Eloise is a constant protagonist.

As for the historical couple, I thought the story line would be good since Penelope was a fun bitchy character in the previous books. It was nice getting to know her, but then she turned super bitch in the end for no reason or at least no justifiable reason in my opinion. I don't want to go into details to prevent spoilers, but the storyline was horribly predictable and the love match was just okay.

Bottom line is if I didn't have the next 2 books in the series listed for a challenge I probably would drop this series. I'm hoping that the series picks up, but I don't really have any expectations at this point.

Kathy Martin says

A marriage of convenience that is remarkably inconvenient for for all parties concerned sees Penelope Deveraux married to Lord Frederick Staines and on her way to India. Freddy has been appointed a special envoy. Freddy isn't at all qualified unless there is a secret need for someone to drink, play cards, and cavort with women not his wife. Penelope is as outrageous as possible to cover her regrets.

The journey to Hyderabad gives her a chance to meet Captain Alex Reid who is a representative of the British leader of Hyderabad. She immediately takes him in dislike and suspects him of all sort of things, not the least of which is treason.

Freddy neglects Penelope badly once they get to Hyderabad and she comes to depend on Alex for companionship. A letter from home also puts her on the alert for the Marigold, a French spy. All sorts of adventures happen including venomous snakes, long journeys through the countryside, and more spies than seem possible.

This was an engaging story set in a country and time that is new to me as a reader. I loved the descriptions. I also loved getting to know Penelope better and coming to understand why she was the way she was in the earlier books.

I am also enjoying the story of Colin and Eloise as they get to know one another better. Colin certainly has an interesting family with all sorts of conflicts.

Susan (susayq ~) says

*****WARNING: POSSIBLE SPOILERS AHEAD*****

It's a true testament to the writing talent of Lauren Willig that I even finished this book. I am a HUGE anti-cheating reader. And what happened in this book? Freddy cheated on Penelope and Penelope cheated on Freddy with Alex, who she fell in love with. Normally, when I got to the scene where Penelope walked in on Freddy and his *bibi* as he called her (and Penelope pointed out that it didn't matter what language he used, it was still his mistress), I wanted to put the book down. Had it been any other book, by any other author, I would have put it down and not looked back. But Lauren Willig hasn't let me down before, and she didn't let me down this time. Yes, later on Penelope ends up with Alex while she's still married to Freddy, but it was easier to forgive her because Freddy had already been unfaithful and Pen was in love with Alex.

The mystery in this one centered around The Marigold, who we met last book. It kept me guessing all the way until the big reveal. By the time we find out who The Marigold is, I had suspected 5 different

characters....none of them were the one!

I hope we get to see more of Alex and Penelope in future books. She's so far from perfect and he's more innocent than she is, but they work together.

Oh! About Collin and Eloise...I like where their relationship is going. It's slow, but it's good. I still think (view spoiler)

Christy B says

I really love this series! The only thing I hate is the long wait in between books!

An action-packed, romance, espionage filled story set in early 19th century India. Yes, please!

When we last saw Penelope, she was forced into a hasty marriage after being caught in a most scandalous act. She finds herself in India as Lady Frederick Staines, where she finds a spy name Marigold lurking about. I loved Penelope. She was a spitfire redhead who made the best of her situation. She found herself in a foreign country married to man she didn't even like, let alone love, and decided to have a little fun.

Arriving in India, Penelope and her new husband are escorted to their new digs in Hyderabad by Captain Alex Reid, and he is in no mood to play baby sitter to aristocrats, but he soon finds Lady Frederick to not be your average English Lady.

As for Eloise's story, I felt it to be a bit stale, here. I usually like her story, but nothing really happened to her in this novel. And the way her chapters kept popping up - right after a shocking revelation in the historical story - made me want to hurl my Sony Reader across the room - that is, if it didn't cost so much.

Willig has done it again. In the sixth installment of the Pink Carnation series, the story is just as exciting as ever. I couldn't read this fast enough, even though I wanted to savor it. Now I must wait until book six, but fortunately I do not have to wait a year, this time!

Pamela says

The Betrayal of the Blood Lily is the sixth installment in Lauren Willig's delightful Pink Carnation series, which chronicles the romantic adventures of Napoleonic (aka Regency) era British spies and the romantic misadventures of modern-day Harvard doctoral student Eloise Kelly, who is researching said spies for her dissertation.

At the very beginning of the series, Eloise is struggling to find sources--any sources--for her dissertation on super-spies the Scarlet Pimpernel (in the series, a real person), his successor the Purple Gentian (Willig's own invention) and the elusive Pink Carnation (ditto), whom she hopes to finally unmask. Eloise is about to throw in the towel and write about espionage and constructs of masculinity (ugh...) when the academic equivalent of manna from Heaven appears: a previously unseen archive in the home of a fairy godmother-esque descendant of the Purple Gentian. What Eloise finds in those archives, and the archives that follow, are the plots of Willig's novels. Did I mention that there is also a Prince Not-So-Charming? Eloise's benefactor's

surly but strapping great-nephew, Colin, makes his entrance in the first book as a foil to our heroine, and their inevitable courtship forms the basis of the series's secondary plotline.

The Betrayal of the Blood Lily is a departure from the other books in the series in that its heroine is already married at the beginning. If you have read the other Pink books (recommended but not required) then you have already made the acquaintance of Penelope Deveraux, bosom friend to the Purple Gentian's younger sister and one of the most incorrigible flirts of the ton. Penelope has finally succeeded in ruining her own reputation. "Compromised" after being caught canoodling with the loutish Lord Freddy Staines, Penelope finds herself rushed to the altar before the book begins. *Blood Lily* also departs, quite literally, from the series's familiar setting of Franco-British courts, assembly halls, and country estates for the wilds of colonial India, where Freddy and Penelope are packed off to allow the scandal surrounding their marriage time to die down. Several of her friends express optimism that exile could be the making of their relationship...

It isn't.

This revelation should not be news to anyone who has read the book jacket. Penelope does not find marital bliss in India. What she does find is a decidedly extra-marital romance in the shape of the dashing Alex Reid, a captain in the British colonial forces charged with escorting Penelope and Freddy to Hyderabad, where Freddy is to assume a low-level diplomatic post at the court of the Nizam. Their romance is one of Willig's finest yet, hard-won, even-handed, and utterly believable. It helps that Penelope is no wilting flower. Like Mary Alsworthy of *The Seduction of the Crimson Rose*, Penelope is a "difficult" heroine--willful, world-weary, but whose hard-armed coquettishness hides a desperate desire to be loved and understood. Penelope shoots cobras, dives into rivers, and matches words with the Nizam's sinister Prime Minister. She is also horribly lonely, having been sent away from all her friends to a strange country with a husband who treats her with utter disregard. Her surprise romance with Alex, who hasn't had the easiest time of it either, is very much a meeting of the minds. That they are first friends before they become lovers is a testament to the deep respect, regard, and understanding that they have for one another.

As for the rest of the plot, this is a Lauren Willig novel so naturally, spies are involved. Our villain, a French spy called the Marigold, was introduced in the last installment. While the Marigold's political treachery isn't fully realized until late in the book, his (or her) personal threat to Penelope, Freddy, and Alex is keenly felt from the first broken girth. Willig does a good job with the suspense and we spend as much time looking over our shoulders as we do straining out bodices. She also does a superb job rendering the elaborate world of colonial India and its intrigues. Many of *Blood Lily*'s juicier elements--the mad Nizam, the leprosy-ridden Prime Minister--are culled straight from history and rendered in perfect detail.

But the plot itself, I'm sorry to say, is at times not quite up to her usual standard. I did keep guessing until the end who the Marigold was (a first for me), but the reveal was something of a letdown. I can't say much more without spoiling it, but we do not get the sense here, as we do in her other books, of the villain's drive. Instead of the mastermind behind a great conspiracy, we find someone who seems to have merely stumbled into a great conspiracy. She also leaves several very blatant loose ends. Chekov famously said that one should not put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is thinking of firing it. In other words, objects introduced in a story must be used later on or else not included. There are two loaded guns here--big ones--that are never fired, and whose lack of use definitely contributed to my feeling not quite satisfied when I turned the last page. A debt that is never repaid? An enemy who never strikes? To say more would reveal too much so I'll just say that a red herring is one thing, a dead end is another.

Don't get me wrong, I really enjoyed this book. It's actually a testament to how far Willig has come as a novelist that I'm nit-picking and griping about the spy plot, which in her first few books served more as a backdrop to the romance than a principal player. As accomplished a writer as she now is, I can't help but feel that she should know better.

In terms of the writing itself, however, Blood Lily is Willig's best yet. Her prose, which was charming but light in her first book, has become nuanced, rich, and elegant. Her characters are vibrant and pointedly realized, her atmospheres are lush, and her descriptions--one in particular of a bloated corpse--at times approach the poetic. Her dialogue, always a strong point, is pitch-perfect and sparkles with echoes of Waugh and Wodehouse. And like Waugh (and occasionally Wodehouse) her writing is also earnest and poignant when called for. We may laugh when Penelope lays into Freddy but we cringe when he sets her down and betrays her trust. There is style, but there is also real emotional substance.

This series is one of my favorite guilty-pleasure reads. It's light without being too light--the intellectual's answer to the dime-store romance. Perhaps it won't come as a surprise that the series came about as an escape for Willig from her own dissertation research. It is by definition escapist literature, the perfect getaway for those of us who want to take a break from the real world and fall blissfully into the past where the men are swashbuckling and the women run the show.

Pierre de Ronsard, Renaissance France's answer to Ariosto, wrote: "History only recounts things the way they are, or were, without disguise or ornament,...the Poet contents himself with the plausible, to that which could be." This is what I see Willig, a former Ph. D. candidate, doing. She loves history, really loves it, to the point where she has to make it come alive and imagine what these people could have said, could have thought, could have done. Her books are impeccably researched down to the type of knee-breeches Lord Freddy would have worn and impeccably imagined down to what Lord Freddy would have said at breakfast. You can't help but feel that these characters must have lived and, what's more, you wish that they did. And that is what historical fiction is all about.

A merry romp and a surprisingly evocative and accomplished book. Grad students past and present especially ought to dive in, as here at last is a heroine (and author) who Understands. I can't believe I have to wait another year for the next one.

Gigi says

With the last book lacking a bit I was unsure how I would like this book. But I was pleasantly surprised! Once again I found myself taking breaks through out the day to read "just one more chapter". This book brought back the tension and romance. Willig got the play between Penelope and Alex just right. And her references to other British literature were subtle which I liked.

But I have finally realized why I don't give this 5 stars...not because it is formulaic but because whenever the tension builds between characters where one is second guessing the other she immediately turns to that others perspective which ends the tension. She should be willing to let things be unknown.

Elizabeth (Miss Eliza) says

But really more like 4.5 stars...we really need half stars on here. Anyway, the sixth installment of the Pink Carnation series does not disappoint and I think it might even get more new readers, seeing as it is set in India and does not rely overly heavily on past events. I also really enjoy Penelope as a heroine and with her starting out the book already married to a man she doesn't love we are in a far different position than previous novels. Instead of an innocent happy virginal character, we have someone a little flirty and a little bitter and very much taken. Of course there are spies and intrigues, but it's the witty banter and interaction between Penelope and Alex Reid (the "hero") that make this book great. Plus India, very exciting and exotic

compared to England, Ireland or France. Only problem is...now that I've read it I want another and this one isn't even technically out till January!!!

Also I'm now giving away this book on my blog:<http://strange-and-random-happenstanc...>

Anna says

SPOILER ALERT - I've really liked Willig's previous books (however guiltily) and wanted to like this one too, but I dislike being put in the position of rooting for a character to commit adultery, however unhappy the circumstances of her marriage. Others might not struggle with that, but it ultimately left me with a sadder feeling about the book than her other novels. I also felt like this was one of her weaker stories, narratively. The "spy" aspect of the plot seems far more contrived with this book than the others, although the Indian setting and depiction of 19th century British life there mostly made up for it. While I don't doubt that there was some historical veracity to some of the schemes she describes, I found them poorly explained, hard to follow and generally less "urgent" or persuasively dire than the nefarities and schemes-to-be-foiled in her previous books. Finally, not to pile on, but this book's dialogue isn't as witty as her previous books. In some ways, I wonder if her inspiration for the series is petering out a bit. Having read all six "Pink" novels, I think the one set in Ireland (#3) is still my favorite.

Allison (The Allure of Books) says

I'm so happy I scored the ARC and got to read this before seeing a bunch of other reviews for it! Although it's also a mixed blessing, because I'm (of course) already dying for the next one and now I just have to wait that much longer for it.

Anyway...on to my review.

Henrietta and Miles have been dethroned from the status of my favorites of the series. Alex and Penelope really got to me! I LOVE how they have all sorts of issues; I hate disgustingly perfect characters. Alex's issues rest mostly on his family and crazed sense of loyalty, while Penelope has a rather large mass of unresolved personal issues she wrestles with throughout the book. I really love the way Willig interpreted her character, and have a great respect for her ability to do so because I don't think most authors could have pulled it off. Just like Aunt Arabella told Eloise, she comes off as spirited, but she is also pretty weighted down with horribly low self worth. Like Alex comes to realize, the spirited, courageous Penelope is hidden behind the stone cold Lady Staines. He helps Penelope kick Lady Staines out on her ass, and I must say I thoroughly enjoyed reading about it! I love when authors can convey a real chemistry between characters, it comes off wanting more often than not. This series, however, never fails to deliver...I was blushing and getting warm fuzzies right along with Penelope.

And of course, there is the ever-wonderful Eloise and Colin. I think Eloise has to be one of my favorite characters of all time. She is bumbling, awkward...and also loyal, charming, and absolutely hilarious. I will never give up hoping they will get their own book one of these days. I hate only getting short glimpses into their world, I want more!

Anyway...this series as a whole is just fabulous. The settings are always historically sound, the characters and their feelings always believable, there is always an abundance of delightfully biting wit, and some of the capers these people get into are ridiculous enough to be on the point of spoof (I don't mean spoof in a bad

way - I mean it as in the characters are channeling the spirit of Amelia Peabody), but real enough to put you on the edge of your seat. In short, this series has it all. And this one, for me, was the best of the lot so far.

There was one thing- toward the end, Alex and Penelope rush off somewhere in a hurry, so she just jumps on his horse with him, but then when they are leaving, their horses (plural) are waiting for them. But, I do just have the ARC, so maybe it was cleared up? *shrug* small potatoes, either way.

CJ - It's only a Paper Moon says

Penelope is forced to marry Freddy through her own flirtation gone awry. As Serena Selwick-Adderly says of Penelope; she's a bit of a "lost soul". There are none that think of her that way except for Captain Alex Reid - the guard that takes charge of Freddy and Pen's travels to Hyderabad, the place where Freddy has a cushy job with a title he hasn't deserved.

Freddy doesn't love his wife and Pen most certainly doesn't love her husband, hell, she doesn't even like him but there are ways that a marriage of convenience can hurt and Freddy knows how to twist the knife in. What no one expects, lease of all Alex, is that Penelope is daring, brave, stubborn, impetuous, regal and hard but most of all she's just a young woman who feels alone. She acts out and sells herself cheaply when she's more than what she thinks and more than what most people assume. A crackshot, a horsewoman, a seductress and witty - Penelope meets her match with Alex.

Unfortunately it's a case of bad timing, or is it? Alex is the epitome of an honorable service man. He's a protector and believes in Penelope when even she doesn't. Of course, he has his own flaws and his own demons, most noticeably in the form of his brother.

India, beautiful but wild, untamed with parts of civilization and hot with bits of staggering coolness best describe Penelope and Alex, a British born child who had grown up in India, it's the perfect match.

Except for the husband, the spies and the politics. There is aspy going by the flowery-epitaph of the Marigold. Which one of Freddy's weasly friend's could it be? Or is it any of them? Could it be Alex? Is it Pen? Lots of accusations and suspicions abound but the core of this book isn't the spy story or the adventures. It's a lost little girl who was made a woman too soon through her own recklessness and treatment and a man who has a fierce love but no one he deems good enough to share it with.

There are twists and turns and it's all well worth it. The story, the landscape and the characters seem to come out of the page and grasp your attention with both hands. Willig has mentioned how much she loves and admires Georgette Heyer and I have a funny idea that Ms. Heyer would like this series as well.

Though this is more a standalone book with none of the core characters in it, there is one character that does show up toward the end and is a nice foil for Penelope's brusque blunt manner.

As with every book in this series, it is a story within a story and I must admit that I was a little bored with Eloise and Colin until their last two chapters. That might be part of the problems with carrying two stories, especially when the modern story is used as a vehicle to get the main historical story across, but I felt like Eloise and Colin fell a littel flat this time around. Let's hope they pick it up in the next book.

I did miss Jane and Henrietta but Penelope, with all of her faults, was a good enough heroine for me to overlook them for 396 pages.

The Lit Bitch says

After the fifth Pink Carnation book, I kind of felt like I needed a little break from the Pink Carnation series. And by little break I mean like five years....thats how long it's been since I read one of the Pink Carnation books.

I love the series as a whole but the last book in the series that I read, just left me a little wanting in the uniqueness category.

So I abandoned it in favor of other books, though I always knew that someday I would come back to it because lets face it, I am in love with this series, but I needed little time to step away from it and come back to it in order to love it.

Granted five years seems excessive, but it happened eventually.

I picked up The English Wife also by Lauren Willig, though it is not connected to the Pink Carnation books, I easily fell in love with her writing and story in The English Wife. So much so that I was reminded why I love the Pink Carnation books.....superb story telling. So I picked up The Betrayal of the Blood Lily and went to town.

As I've mentioned before in my other reviews of the series, Willig has a kind of 'formula' that she uses in her Pink Carnation series.....strong aristocratic lady meets stubborn dashing bachelor in tights and they blunder through espionage 101 and ultimately end up having a HEA. While it's formulaic, it doesn't ring false for Willig because she always comes up with memorable and unique characters.

I never liked Penelope in the other books. She was kind of the resident 'skank'. She was reckless and impulsive and I just wasn't really into her, however I was interested to see how her 'romance' was going to play out in this book. Could Willig convince me that she was able to find true love based on what I had seen of her in the other books?

The short answer is yes.

I loved how Willig took the classic romance trope and kind of made an anti romance of sorts. When we meet Penelope she is married to Freddy whose she was forced into a marriage with back in the fifth book I believe.

Freddy is positively useless and a complete jack ass. In the fifth book, Charlotte had said that maybe the marriage and removal to India would be the making of their marriage, so I thought that this book would be about them coming together but it was far from that. I literally couldn't stand Freddy by the end of the first chapter. He was irritating, useless, and puffed up well above his station. I felt so bad for Penelope but at the same time, I wasn't completely sorry for her.

Then we have Captain Alex Reid. Straight laced and noble. A man who can hardly stand the sight of Freddy. It became rather apparent that Penelope had designs on Alex but as a noble officer, he was inclined to pass on that situation. However against his better judgement, he finds himself being won over by Penelope.

I agree with Collin's great aunt's opinion of Penelope's story.....it's the most tragic. Penelope is so impulsive and self destructive at times that is borders on disastrous. I loved how that played out in the

developing romance between Alex and Penelope. It made for a completely different approach to romance than in some of the other Pink Carnation books. In this book, Penelope is very married and Alex is almost too noble when it comes to respecting women. Slowly I was just as won over as Alex and I appreciated the unique trope in this book. I didn't find the adultery aspect distasteful at all, though others might not agree.

The only thing that I thought distracted from this novel was the Indian history. All the other Pink Carnation books are set in England. The last book's hero was from India but it was still set in England so the landscape and politics were familiar. In this book that is not the case. I had a hard time following or appreciating the politics in India and basically the entire setting didn't do a whole lot for me. It should have been this exotic and unique land but I felt like the setting was under utilized. I was more interested in the romance than anything else and as far as I can tell it was only set here to set up future books and characters. In my opinion, this could have been set in England as well but I guess if Willig wanted to give readers a break from the Western politics then India seemed like the next logical setting.

Over all this was a good book and I was reading well into the night. Even if I didn't think it was as good as some of the others in the series, I still enjoyed it enough to start the next book immediately after closing the cover on this one.

See my full review here

Gawelleb says

Les débuts furent laborieux et ont nécessité toute une pause déjeuner sur wikipédia pour me familiariser avec l'histoire de l'Inde du début du 19^{ème}! Mais alors, les efforts en valaient la peine!

Après un roman très conte de fée avec l'histoire de Charlotte et Robert, Lauren Willig nous dépeint ici une romance bien plus adulte!

Alex et Penelope sont loin d'être naïfs mais conscients de ce qu'ils sont, de leurs qualités et de leur défauts. Alex est parfait! Penelope est un peu comme Mary (dans le tome Vaughn/ Mary) consciente de ce qu'est la place d'une femme dans la société et de ce qu'elle ne souhaite pas être.

Ensemble, ils sont très touchants. Par contre, j'avoue ne pas m'être intéressée à Eloise (un peu trop TSL à mon goût depuis quelques tomes) et Colin. Leur intrigue est un peu WTF.

Bref, une fois encore Lauren Willig m'a surprise livrant une histoire différente des autres.
