



A Duel of Hearts

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Could she set free from the secret that threatened their love?

They were strangers, meeting by destiny in a lonely, moonlit wood. Because of an indiscretion, Lady Caroline Faye finds herself in a moonlit glade beside the body of a dead man, and his murderer. Rescued by Lord Vane Brecon, she conceals her true identity, but secretly swears to repay him.

Returned to her glittering world of balls and adoring suitors, Lady Caroline remembered only the despairing eyes of the nobly handsome man who called himself Lord Brecon. And later, when she found he was in danger of his life, she left the glamorous whirl of an heiress to find the one man who haunted her dreams.

But when Lady Caroline tried to warn him, she was shocked to find how little he cared to live. Only when Brecon's enemy appeared and forced them to take desperate measures did she learn of a sinister secret and the true reason for his despair....

A Duel of Hearts Details

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Ivy H says

That's the heroine (Lady Caroline de Faye) of this story's motto ! This is the second novel in the duet that started with this heroine's parents. The first novel, A Hazard of Hearts, dealt with the love story of Caroline's parents, Justin and Serena (the Marquis and Marchioness of Vulcan). Caroline's only 18 yrs old but she's spoilt, beautiful, a daddy's girl princess and an heiress who wants to find the same kind of special love that her parents share. Caroline's very sheltered but adventurous and she thinks that her daddy's big bad reputation as a former rake, rogue, duellist, crack pistol shooter and all around badass is gonna protect her from wastrels while she's in London for her debut season. After all, who in their right minds is gonna try and compromise, seduce or elope with the daughter of the infamous Lord Vulcan ? The silly heroine gets caught up in the adventures of her first season and makes a few stupid decisions because she thinks that none of her admirers will dare to disrespect her. But, she fails to remember that she's the prime target for fortune hunters since she's been judged the most beautiful debutante and the richest one too. This is my impression of the spoilt princessy daddy's girl heroine:

At the beginning of the story our intrepid heroine has been abducted, without even knowing it, by a middle aged debt ridden guy called Sir Montague Reversby. Sir Montague had asked Caroline to marry him many times but she kept turning him down and laughing at him. He turned the tables on her by appealing to her desire for adventure and persuaded her to participate in a curricule race. She ends up being taken to an inn but escapes before he can carry her off to Gretna Green and marry her by force. That's when she meets the hero. After she escapes from Sir Montague, Caroline finds a dead body in the woods. The H is Vane, Lord Brecon and he's been lured to these woods and framed for the murder of the dead man. Vane's a Baron who's very apathetic and pessimistic; he almost doesn't care if he's framed and punished and the opinionated heroine finds this troublesome. She uses her common sense and convinces the H not to just give up. She also helps him to escape and to sort out a convincing alibi. The troublesome heroine is filled with infatuation because Vane is the first guy who meets her requirements for the ideal husband. She doesn't tell him her real identity though, because she's afraid of getting into trouble with her parents.

This is my impression of the hero, Vane:

Vane is a depressed and apathetic H because he thinks that he has inherited **bad blood** from his father's side of the family. There's this big monstrous, scary and gory family secret in Brecon castle: Vane's younger sister was born with severe physical deformities and is also mentally unstable. She's locked away with a nurse in a secret chamber because she's a bit of a psycho who likes to kill and torture little animals. Vane is afraid to marry and have kids because he doesn't want to pass on this **bad blood** to the future generation. He knows somebody is trying to kill him but he is so depressed and disillusioned with life that he doesn't really care about saving himself. His mother has been bedridden since the birth of his sister and his jealous cousin Gervase has installed a spy called Mrs. Miller. Brecon Castle is like a gloomy horror freakshow theatre. The heroine, who is infatuated with the H and wants to save him his enemies, poses as an ordinary working girl who is seeking employment as his mother's new companion. Caroline is a madcap heroine; she's brave, full of schemes and doesn't take shit from anybody !

When she goes to Brecon Castle, she is stunned at how awful the place is because Mrs. Miller (who's also cousin Gervase's lover) bosses all the servants around since the H's mother refuses to leave her bedchamber. Mrs. Miller is plotting with Gervase either to kill the H or to frame him for someone else's murder. The heroine's arrival at the dismal castle infuriates Mrs Miller who is immediately jealous of the beautiful and confident Caroline, whom she thinks is just a commoner called Caroline Fry:

'I wish to say, Miss Fry,' Mrs, Miller began, 'that there is no need for you to dazzle us at night in a creation such as you are wearing at the moment. 'Tis unsuitable for someone in your position, and presumptuous for you to take advantage of Lady Brecon's absence to flaunt yourself before the other occupants of the Castle. I am in charge here, as you know, and unless you can find yourself suitable garments such as should be worn by someone in your humble station in life, then I shall make arrangements for the maids to bring you a tray in your room. In many houses a companion does not enjoy the privilege of eating with her employers, but Lady Brecon has—with what is in my mind, mistaken magnanimity —allowed it here. But if you wish for the company of your betters, it must be conditional upon your correct appearance. Is that clear?'

Barbara Cartland. A Duel of Hearts (Kindle Locations 1737-1743). Arrow Books. Kindle Edition.

Mrs. M has bullied everyone in the castle, except for the H but now, she's more than met her match since the heroine isn't the daughter of Lord Vulcan for nothing:

She looked her in the face and said: 'I am sorry if my gowns displease you, Ma'am, but they are provided for me by Lady Caroline Faye who is reputed to have the best of taste. They are unfortunately all I possess. However, I will speak to her ladyship in the morning or if you prefer it tonight, and ask if my salary can be extended to buy the type of drab uniform which suits your pleasure.'

Mrs. Miller gasped for a moment, then found her voice. 'How dare you speak to me in that tone!' she said.

Barbara Cartland. A Duel of Hearts (Kindle Locations 1745-1750). Arrow Books. Kindle Edition.

The heroine was definitely the key character in this novel because she was instrumental in the following:

1. She helped to prove that Gervase and Mrs. Miller were plotting to kill the H.
2. She helped to save her meek mousy friend Harriet from the latter's bullying father; in fact, Caroline played matchmaker and found a nice guy for Harriet to marry.
3. She persuaded the H to become more optimistic about his future, even though he was a jealous and possessive idiot because cousin Gervase had lied and spread nasty rumours about her. Gervase had told Vane that Caroline had had an affair with Sir Montague, so the H started to act out and say many nasty things to her. Gervase also revealed Caroline's real identity in an effort to get rid of the heroine, but this backfired and led to the MC's marriage of convenience ! Gervase was a bit stupid because he didn't stop to think that Caroline's father was a powerful man who would obviously feel that the H had compromised his little princess, even though she had been the one to don a fake identity and scheme her way into Brecon castle.

THE BEST PART OF THE STORY IS

(view spoiler)

This was even more enjoyable than A Hazard of Hearts, even though the H in that novel (Caroline's dad) was sexier and more assertive than this H. This novel had a lot more intrigue, mystery and more minor storylines. I also enjoyed seeing how much in love Caroline's parents continued to be but I was a bit disappointed that the author didn't provide any cameo appearances by the heroine's 2 brothers. They spent the entire novel away at Eton since they're younger than the heroine. Caroline was certainly smarter, more independent and stronger than most of Barbara Cartland's heroines. Her mother Serena had been a demure and fragile Mary Sue type of heroine in A Hazard of Hearts, but Caroline took risks and plotted to help save the man she loved. The H was totally appreciative of all that she'd done to help him and his grovelling was sort of sweet:

'You make me ashamed, Caroline. I can only say that no man could be worthy of such a love or of a woman such as you.'

Barbara Cartland. A Duel of Hearts (Kindle Locations 4366-4367). Arrow Books. Kindle Edition.

And, the heroine is lucky that she only gets away with a mild scolding from her parents, since they're happy and proud to have a son in law who's the son of a family friend:

'But, Mama-' Caroline began in a very small voice.

Lady Vulcan laughed. 'Do not be feared. We are not angry with you, not since we have met your husband, darling, for I vow that your father and I are already delighted with our son-in-law. Despite the grave things he has related to us with most estimable frankness, he is all that we ever wished for you.'

Barbara Cartland. A Duel of Hearts (Kindle Locations 4919-4922). Arrow Books. Kindle Edition.

If you like to read about adventurous (and sometimes annoying) heroines who are smart enough to save their man from being murdered, then you'll enjoy this.

Zsuzsanna says

Properly crafted romance, with all the necessary ingredients - adventure, love, passion, secrets, scheming -, where the clever and brave (and beautiful) heroine (of full 17 years) decides to risk everything in order to save her true love.

L. (Vacation All I Ever Wanted) says

~~Mary Sue Nancy Drew~~ Lady Caroline Faye goes undercover to solve the mystery of Lord Brecon, the most handsome man she had ever seen. (Because Cartland heroines don't truck with mediocre males.) Caroline finds herself embroiled in blackmail, murder, a homicidal maniac, new loves, long lost loves, and secret babies.

Judith Brennan says

A romping romance with a very silly plot. A quick enjoyable read.

Jane says

[The disabled child treated as a monster and locked up for its entire life was probably quite acceptable in Cartland's day, but I couldn't stomach it. (hide spoiler)]

SSShafiq says

Read this novel and see the movie if you can as well. I think I remember the plot of his novel more because of the movie than the novel but ah well. I remember this with great fondness. I love all of Ms Cartland novels since I read them when I was young and these were readily available at my best friends house. We grew up on these novels so these are coloured rose pink for me. I know they have not aged well especially the silly stuttering of the heroines but I choose to ignore that and remain in my nostalgic bliss.

Treece says

Rating: 4 1/2 stars

An intriguing, wild story featuring two passionate and strong-willed MCs, Vane, and Caroline, whose chemistry seared the pages! The plot was a gigantic tangle of Gothic-gooeyness, eclectic symbolism, stereotypical villains, engaging and repulsive secondary characters, and a host of OTT backstories and cavernous secrets that had me asking, "Did this really happen in a BC novel?" Well, I guess it did because, Holy Willy Jeepers, Batman! It was a crazy amazing ride with this one. I would re-read this one if I had the time.

A really unusual effort for Dame Barbara. This is a tale where the h saves the H time and time again. I can see this pair engaged in a fiery marriage many years to come!

Sudha Neelakantan says

Plagiarized?

Fun, light, seemingly borrowed from georgette heyer -- so much from the reluctant widow -- but good light romance. Must be one of her earlier books since its a bit better written. The race and class distinctions are eye opening

Emily says

One of my New Year Resolutions this year was to write a review, however short, of everything I read. I don't really know where to begin reviewing this one tho! My lingering emotion after closing the book is a sort of ferocious indignation, really. I picked it up because Barbara Cartland is v famous and I've never read

anything by her. To start with I thought the book was way less OTT/melodramatic than I'd been expecting, given her reputation. And by the end I was just appalled by what a feeble story it was. Some of the twists I predicted, some I didn't, one near the end literally made me laugh out loud. I'm also kind of reluctant to file this as 'romance' tbh - it was love at first sight and then lots of angst and exceptionally poor communication skills on behalf of the hero, not to mention him being an utter jerk towards the heroine. Zero relationship development at all - no sense of WHY they were in love. And, towards the end, some pretty gag-worthy sections where the hero talks about 'mastering' the heroine in a way that I suppose Cartland thought was sexy? And not in a "final plot twist: I'm totally into BDSM" way (this is a mainstream novel from 1949...) - very much in a "this is how relationships between husband and wives are" way. I am kinkshaming you, Cartland, I am kinkshaming you.

From the very end, so this is part of the romantic finale: *And in that moment Caroline understood the change in him. Never again would she take the initiative, never again would she be able to impel and goad him into obeying her commands. Her old suzerainty had ended. She might coax, cajole and entice him, but he would be her master.*

In the context of that paragraph, it's worth noting that Caroline is 100% the driver of the plot (or what there is of one). Vane's role in the book is largely to be a bit damsel-in-distress and intensely angsty and nasty at key points. There's only one part of the book where he's responsible for forward action, otherwise the story is entirely Caroline's.

However, I did manage to finish it, and there was one subplot about the heroine's best friend which entertained me, so hey: two stars, not one!

Amber says

Deus ex machina and more weird flirtations with incest!

Aurora James says

One of my all time favorites

I saw the movie ages ago and loved it, so I very much wanted to read the book. I wasn't disappointed. Though a little different from the movie, which I expected, it was a wonderful story of love and intrigue. My main complaint is that it needs a copy editor in the worst way. I can't believe this came from a publisher.

Susan Clark says

Still Love it!

When I was a teenager, this was a favorite. Now I'm older and married and still find it enthralling. I recommend this sweet book that still has heart pounding intrigue.

Yuvadee Patchon says

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