

Sylvester or the Wicked Uncle

Georgette Heyer

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Endowed with rank, wealth and elegance, Sylvester, Duke of Salford, posts into Wiltshire to discover if the Honorable Phoebe Marlow will meet his exacting requirements for a bride. If he does not expect to meet a tongue-tied stripling wanting both manners and conduct, then he is intrigued indeed when his visit causes Phoebe to flee her home. They meet again on the road to London, where her carriage has come to grief in the snow. Yet Phoebe, already caught in one imbroglio, now knows she soon could be well deep in another...

A typically wonderful historical novel, *Sylvester* shows once more why Georgette Heyer is the undisputed queen of the genre she created – the Regency romance.

Sylvester or the Wicked Uncle Details


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From Reader Review Sylvester or the Wicked Uncle for online ebook

Vivian says

Living La Vida Loca.

Alrighty, so this starts off with the trapped heroine Phoebe and then proceeds...some of it's reasonable and some is just a ride on the crazy train. Boy does she meet some interesting people on this ride.

Phoebe is headstrong and rather indiscreet while communicating (lacks a filter) is rightfully chaffing at the bit and when it all looks horrible she flees. Trust me, I've been in the chew your leg off to get away situation and I'm sympathetic. All for the idea. Alas, the execution of her plan lacked thought.

Tom, sensibility and patience are his key attributes as he deals with the immature and idiotic. Frankly, the best character in the story. I liked Tom.

Sylvester, the Ice Duke, starts off fine and the character seems to stay true until the end when he turns and smashes straight into a tree. I had a really hard time making the change of heart leap with him.

And the ending...

Seemed like a lesser Cotillon to me. Freddy is a better Tom and Kitty is less flighty/ridiculous/impetuous than Phoebe. But! I came away with a winter beverage idea, so overall, good. 3.5 stars rounded up because it was a fast and fun read.

Keighley, fortified by a potation of gin, beer, nutmeg and sugar, which he called hot flannel, raised no objection; so the horses were put to again.

QNPoohBear says

Sylvester Rayne, the Duke of Salford has everything he could possibly want. He had a happy childhood with loving parents and a twin brother and inherited everything upon his father's death. His late brother left him a young heir and a silly sister-in-law to care for and his invalid mother depends on him. With his sister-in-law about to wed a nodcock, his mother needs a woman to socialize with and his nephew Edmund needs a mother. Sylvester's mother is horrified to discover he has a list of attributes he wants in a wife and there are five candidates he thinks are suitable. But what of love? Love? Sylvester doesn't believe love matters in marriage. His mother proposes Sylvester choose her dearest friend's daughter, the Honorable Phoebe Marlowe. Phoebe is also the granddaughter of Sylvester's godmother, Lady Ingham. Phoebe has no interest in marriage, let alone marriage to the Duke of Salford who once cut her. Phoebe wants to live with her governess in a house somewhere and write novels. She's just written one and it was accepted for publication. In fact, Sylvester features largely in the novel. She hates him and is determined to give him a disgust of her.

She won't have to do much for Salford is coming for a visit and she knows he will be bored to tears. Phoebe isn't far off but when Sylvester has a chance to escape he finds events have transpired that he could never have predicted.

While Georgette Heyer is one of my favorite authors and rarely made a mistake, I feel like this novel is almost two different stories. The first half of the book is really funny. Sylvester is tough to like because he's so high in the instep, but he soon thaws out and becomes more human and likable. The romance starts to build nicely with the characters coming together, sharing experiences and a sense of humor. I just love Heyer's meeting of the minds relationships where the characters share a joke. I don't care for silly chits and older heroes who act like a father figure or a bully. Then comes the misunderstanding and the book falls apart. The misunderstanding shouldn't have been that and though it leads to another funny section, Sylvester handled it badly and I can't like him after that. The next section is a lot of fun and I enjoyed it a lot, but then the story wraps up too quickly. It bothers me that Sylvester and Phoebe never really talk about the misunderstanding. The story lacks the romantic factor I was looking for at the end. That made me drop the rating down, but the book is still in my top 10 Heyer novels.

I really liked Phoebe. She's intelligent but doesn't take herself too seriously. She's been abused by her stepmother and ignored by her father. She loves horses more than people and riding more than dancing. She's unusual not being beautiful and more of a tomboy than a typical lady should be. Because she was abused, she has a flight response when faced with adversity. She has a few other issues that are never really addressed because of the time she lived in. Phoebe is strong and plucky though and also kind and nurturing. Sylvester should only be so lucky to marry her.

Sylvester is modeled after Mr. Darcy. Like Darcy he thinks highly of himself and is used to everyone treating him with deference because of his position. He's a kind master and landlord but only for the sake of having contented servants and tenants instead of being truly compassionate. He believes he has only to ask and any woman would fall over herself to marry him. Some of the language Heyer uses is nearly the same as the language Austen uses for Darcy. Like Darcy Sylvester is very proud and his pride gets in the way sometimes. Like Darcy, Sylvester lost his father at a young age and has the weight of the world on his shoulders. Unlike Darcy he has more reason to be cold and distant-he lost his twin brother and is now the only child in addition to being the Duke and all that entails. He is truly caring with he's with his mother so we know he has a softer side but he rarely shows that to Phoebe. Sylvester does show a different side of himself to Phoebe early on in the novel but then he retreats to his toplofty self again when he feels his dignity being threatened. I think he needs a sense of humor about his distinctive feature. It would have solved some of the problem.

I like Phoebe's friend Tom much better. Tom is a loyal friend. He stands by Phoebe and will do anything to help her with no romantic feelings whatsoever. He helps out whenever needed and keeps Phoebe's secrets. I would rather marry Tom than Sylvester.

Sylvester's godmother and Phoebe's grandmother, Lady Ingham, is a grande dame but she has a kind heart. Though she often has nervous spasms as a means of getting attention, it doesn't make me hate her. I think she's rather selfish but she does care for her granddaughter and wants her granddaughter to be happy. She's a bit machiavellian but with the best interests of all at heart. She's much nicer than Ianthe, Lady Henry Rayne, Sylvester's sister-in-law. Ianthe is ditzy, silly, and selfish. She's not the world's worst mother but she cares more for how she looks with her son than for her son. Granted, at this time it was normal for children to be raised by nannies, tutors, governesses and servants. They rarely saw their parents so I suppose Edmund is luckier than most, but he's not because his mother is a nitwit. Ianthe betrays Phoebe, Sylvester and her son. I can't stand her histrionics. Edmund has all the Rayne pride from his uncle and all the selfishness of his mother. Of course, he's only 6 years old! He failed to charm me though I understood his behavior. The cast of secondary characters is rounded out by Ianthe's beau, Sir Nugent. He's a fop and totally puffed up with self worth based on his fortune, but he is a nice guy fundamentally, aside from his poor taste in fashion.

I enjoyed this reread with the Georgette Heyer GoodReads group.

Kathy says

I'm in a Georgette Heyer reading phase currently. So yes this is another book by her, my 3rd one this week. I'll likely take a break to catch up on a few other books I need to get read but will definitely come back to Heyer's novels soon as there are still over a dozen of her books I want to read.

This one has an entertaining storyline. Sylvester is painted to be a wicked uncle but nothing could be further from the truth. Phoebe never intends to marry and certainly would never consider the arrogant Duke of Salford. He is after all the inspiration for the villain in her soon to be published novel.

When these two are thrown together through circumstances out of their control one can only sit back and enjoy the ensuing adventures.

This is my kind of Regency romance!

Content: Clean (use of the exclamation "Good God")

Tweety says

Wonderful...

For some reason my brain isn't functioning well enough to give a synopsis, thankfully others have already done so, so I needn't.

Phoebe is one of my favorite heroines, she's just as charming as Arabella, (who's shy too), Sophy, with her incorrigible ways, and Heyer's laugh-out-loud wit. Sylvester could not have found his match better in Phoebe, who he endearingly called "Sparrow". I like the secondary characters, Tom especially because he is similar to Freddy in Cotillion only we get to see his smarts a bit more. However I found Sylvester's sister in law irritating, I know she was supposed to be funny, but she wasn't. At least she wasn't a Tiffany Wield!

I liked seeing how Sylvester grows throughout the book. I had moments where I didn't like him because of his attitude, but then I remembered that I'd probably do nearly the same as him if I didn't think first. His reaction to Phoebe's novel is a bit of a twist on P&P, and I loved it. If you love regency, definitely read this, if you're like me and don't care particularly for regency still give it a go if you like humor and colorful characters.

This my favorite Heyer regency, besides The Toll-Gate, Black Sheep, The Grand Sophy, Arabella & Frederica. A mild PG for the suggestion of mistresses and "bits of muslin".

Jaima says

Sylvester reminded me again why I consider Georgette Heyer's novels the high water mark in regency

romance. If I wasn't lost in the story, I would be taking notes!

Heyer gives us Sylvester, a handsome, self-important duke and Phoebe, a wispy girl oppressed by a martinet step mother, who 'didn't take'. It's a vastly enjoyable pairing, though not especially unusual. It's the writing and the characterization that lift these two above the rest.

Unlike so many contemporary romance writers, Heyer doesn't allow Phoebe or Sylvester to marinate in issues and emotive stupidity. Their stoicism is more effective in revealing their dispositions and depth of feeling than paragraphs of anguished soul-searching and tortured laments. Brusque Sylvester can hardly speak of his dead twin brother and only indulges in one or two memories (happy ones, I'm glad to say), but I understood his cynicism and scathing critiques and liked him. He's got strong appeal: hot-tempered and hasty with insults, he makes more enemies than friends, but he is honorable, hiding a tender heart beneath the scowls. He reads novels--any that come in his way--so he can talk them over with his invalid mother. And it comes off understated and sincere, not as a trite device.

Phoebe, a coltish hoyden, doesn't speak of her sufferings either. We don't see her get slapped by her stepmother (though the woman is physically abusive). The cold, unfeeling dialogue gets the feeling across, as does Phoebe's determination to keep her freedom once she makes her escape. But Phoebe isn't a martyr. She considers herself fortunate in her friendships, likes her stepsisters, and never once appeared a figure of persecuted virtue (view spoiler). She never minces words and it makes her immensely likeable. She says clever and funny things that really are clever and funny, not just mediocrities applauded by a cast of secondary characters. Also, she is secretly a lady novelist, and might have just modeled her villain after Sylvester.

Of course, by the time she is halfway in love with him, her book has been accepted for publication and already printed.

And that's not even the half of it. Throw in one fatuous dandy, Sir Nugent Fotherby, Sylvester's gorgeous, helpless, and self-obsessed sister-in-law, a conniving god-mother, some horses, Sylvester's young nephew, who happens to be his heir and ward, Phoebe's trusty friend (the young squire, naturally), a clique of society gossips, a kidnapping and a flight to France. It's a winner.

I read the print book and also listened to the Naxos audiobook performed by Richard Armitage. The audiobook is abridged, but Armitage's performance makes up for the delicious absurdities that were trimmed away. I'm definitely going to listen to his other ones!

Sherwood Smith says

Up until about the two-thirds mark, this was a favorite among the Heyers: the novel-writing heroine, a bit of a geek, Sylvester who *looks* wicked but isn't, and a host of great side characters.

But it tips over the line (for me) with too much humiliation of the heroine, and too much bitter bickering, something I can get fed up with real fast in what is supposed to be a light romance.

Sistermagpie says

::sigh:: I feel like I'm probably in the minority on this book. I started out loving it and wound up really hating it, so I gave it a three.

The problem, I guess was that it just felt too one-sided to me. Okay, Sylvester's snobby and indifferent to people he doesn't care about so it's good for him to get smacked in the face with his flaws. Either from the

mouth of the originally (to me) likable heroine or from her pen as the anonymous author of a trashy novel that casts him as the villain.

Unfortunately, for all his indifference, Sylvester wound up being the character who seemed to feel the most things, and while people criticized him for being cold they also criticized him whenever he openly felt something. Basically I spent a lot of the book sure that it would eventually be satisfying, because after many pages of Sylvester having to face his own flaws surely Phoebe would get her own slap in the face awakening, if only in a short scene. But no, Phoebe was just adorable and her personality was all the best for Sylvester as long as she had the patience to deal with him.

I think the turning point for me was the scene at a ball where Phoebe sees Sylvester for the first time after he's read her novel, knowing that she wrote it. Rather than openly cutting her (and letting everyone know that she was indeed the author) he dances with her, telling her off through a pleasant smile, and promising to keep her secret. But Phoebe can only dish it out and not take it, so Sylvester's just rude for showing actual feelings in response to her book. When she runs off and blows her own cover it's really Sylvester's fault. (No one ever suggests that writing a novel full of caricatures anonymously could also be showing indifference, or be mean, or cowardly.)

So I wound up sick of Phoebe and embarrassed for Sylvester, especially when even the revelation that the specific coldness in him that turned Phoebe off was a by-product of grief didn't make a difference. Like I said, maybe if I read the book again it would come across totally different, but as of now I just found it depressing as a love story between a flawed guy everyone joins in cutting down to size and a flawed girl everyone protects and fusses over. I know that Sylvester himself makes a remark about it, and Tom also does, but there's no scene where she actually has a moment of her own soul-searching. People have compared it to *Pride and Prejudice*, but it's more like *P&P* where Lizzie's original picture of Darcy was funny instead of a character flaw.

Sammy Loves Books says

“The charm of your society, my Sparrow, lies in not knowing what you will say next – though one rapidly learns to expect the worst!”

Sylvester

"She blurts out whatever may come into her head; she tumbles from one outrageous escapade into another; she's happier grooming horses and hobnobbing with stable-hands than going to parties; she's impertinent; you daren't catch her eye for fear she should start to giggle; she hasn't any accomplishments; I never saw anyone with less dignity; she's abominable, and damnably hot at hand, frank to a fault, and – a darling!

Phoebe

Phrynne says

After many, many years of reading her books I still cannot fault Georgette Heyer as the best writer of Regency fiction. Some of her books are marginally better than others but they are all good and I always read (reread) them when I feel that I need a treat!

Sylvester is one of my favourites. It actually starts off rather slowly but once our main characters arrive at the inn (most of Miss Heyer's best action takes place in wayside inns) the pace picks up. I actually sat and read from this point right through to the end because I was enjoying it so much.

Now I feel very much like picking up another one.....

Melissa McShane says

UPDATE 7/15/17: Listened to this as an audiobook read by Nicholas Rowe and thoroughly enjoyed it. His interpretation of Sir Nugent Fotherby is hilarious.

UPDATE 3/13/14: I really do like Sylvester as a character and love that the book really is about him and his growth as a person. It fascinates me that he can be arrogant without realizing he is, because he's been taught arrogance means behaving with hauteur toward people lesser than him. His ultimate realization that he loves Phoebe and may have ruined the possibility of finding happiness with her, that desperation, gets me every time.

9/11/12: This remains my favorite Heyer romance--I've found that my affection for others grows or diminishes over time, but Sylvester continues to hold a place in my heart. I think it's because the two main characters, Sylvester and Phoebe, make not only a good romantic pairing but also make such a dynamic pairing, playing off one another's strengths and weaknesses. Sylvester seems to me one of Heyer's most human characters; his arrogance isn't typical, he's got an overwhelming personality but is humble enough to admit when he's done something wrong, and while his arrogance is one of his worst character flaws, he also puts it to service in doing some very generous acts. Phoebe, on the other hand, with her combination of shyness and quick wit, is a more common character type, and it's her situation that makes her appealing. Though to the world it's astounding that someone like Sylvester should lose his heart to someone like Phoebe, they really are perfectly matched.

I am outraged, every time, at how Sylvester blows up at Phoebe in public because of her unflattering (and accurate) portrayal of him in her novel, but not so much about his rage. What I hate is that Phoebe spends weeks asking people she respects for advice on what to do about the book, and knows she really ought to warn Sylvester so he isn't blindsided, but everyone she talks to insists she shouldn't tell him. And then, when it's all come to a head *every one of them* says something like "oh, wow, you really should have told him, why didn't you tell him, you are so dumb." That poor kid. Fortunately, when Phoebe and Sylvester come together in the end, it makes everything better.

Kim Kaso says

This book has a special place in my heart as it always reminds me of my mother's laughter. I remember coming up the stairs listening to her laugh while she was reading in bed. I lent her Sylvester to read, I had read many GH novels with my best friend, but we did not think to lend them to our mothers until we got older. For a time, they were ours, no adults welcome. But by HS, my mom and I were trading books back and forth, & Sylvester was her first. How it made her laugh, and now that she is gone and I am older than she was then, it is a gift to have the memory of her laughter and delight in the antics of "Sparrow" her "Dook" and the precocious Edmund, his feather-brained and self-involved mother, as well as the natty nabob, and the

many others who filled this book and made it a rollicking ride. Very highly recommended, especially if you need a cure for the blues, as I did while re-reading it.

Optimist ?King's Wench? & MANTIES Champion says

I came for Armitage. That man's voice makes me...

..an idiot.

erm... so yeah, Armitage was a win. The man's got skillz.

This story, though cute, didn't WOW me. This was my first Heyer and I'll just confess that *usually* I have a hard time getting invested in MF historical romance. How did men and women find love back then? Constantly supervised. Constraining societal expectations. Seems like everyone was prone to the vapors if anyone stepped a toe out of line. Yet, oddly, when it's MM all of this works GRRRRRRRRRRRRReat!! for me so... #weirdo #grainofsaltreview

In this case Phoebe has written a book which is loosely based on Sylvester and cast him as the villain! Well, you can imagine the *ton* is scandalized. He's Fussy McFusserstan. She's aflutter that the *ton* have read her book at all positively bursting with remorse for how she's cast and possibly disparaged Sylvester's character.

Naturally, her being the author is the worst kept secret since forever.

And then somehow they fall in love. They do snipe at each other quite a bit then sort of become frenemies who, I guess, decided arguing with each other til the end of their days was preferable to... not.

shrugs

What I did find simultaneously jarring and quaint was the random classical music at the end of some of the chapters. Not all. Just some. I reminded me of those PBS or maybe BBC mini series movies. Weird but kind of cute too.

I guess I'll go with **3.5 Stars**.

Thanks again to Armitage for the eargasms.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Sometimes I find Georgette Heyer's books so delightful; sometimes I find them tedious. *Sylvester* falls somewhere in the middle.

Take one somewhat arrogant, self-assured duke with very distinctive slanted eyebrows:

(I'm thinking Zachary Quinto as Spock, minus the ears. And the odd haircut.)*

*Some of my GR friends objected to Spock as Sylvester. Comment #22 contains perhaps a better visual image. :)

and one intelligent, awkward, impulsive, average-looking girl with unfashionably tanned skin, a wicked wit and a habit of putting recognizable members of the *ton* in her novels:

(her skin isn't tanned enough here but I like that she's holding a book.)

Add a great platonic guy friend, a spoiled nephew with a penchant for incorporating into his vocabulary any bad words that he hears, and various irascible relatives. Mix well.

Georgette Heyer fans will find a lot to love here. The proposal scene toward the end was notable for its echoes of the first Darcy proposal in *Pride and Prejudice*, except even more awkward, hard as that may be to believe. I thought it was a little slow in parts, and I got impatient with the heroine's silly escapades, but overall it was a reasonably good Regency read.

Rebecca May says

This was the third novel of Georgette Heyer's that I found, again under the guise of an audio-book narrated by Richard Armitage. I have extolled all of Richard Armitage's many virtues as a narrator in previous reviews, and I shall continue to do so until someone gets sick of it and tells me to shut the hell up... and maybe not even then. As usual his reading was perfectly paced, pleasant to listen to, and his vocal range deeply impressive. What I particularly enjoyed in this one was the fact that some of his accents seemed slightly more... countrified, than in his other narrations. Those voices that he did "countrify" were appropriate, and conversely his depiction of Sylvester was perfectly aristocratic. I absolutely loved it.

Now then, I have seen *Sylvester* occasionally compared to *Pride and Prejudice*, which I think is frankly rather absurd. Aside from Phoebe's original and incidentally mostly well-founded prejudice against the Duke of Salford, there is almost nothing in the plot to allow for an adequate comparison of the two. However, I do believe it to be perfectly reasonable to compare the character of Sylvester, Duke of Salford, to that of Mr Darcy. To that end, I'm going to try and keep going through the review what I'm going to call – very pretentiously, I might add, but I can't help myself - "The Darcy Simile".

The first few chapters of the novel I found to be very entertaining, and also very well placed. Without these chapters at the start which gave the reader an opportunity to get to know Sylvester, and some of the reasons behind his arrogance, I am sure I would have found him to be quite a stuck up, unsatisfactory hero until these things were explained. In terms of "The Darcy Simile", the Duke of Salford does have more actual pride and arrogance than Mr Darcy, but while Darcy's seeming coldness stemmed from shyness, Sylvester's arrogance stemmed from his devastation over the death of his brother. Even after four years he still hasn't entirely recovered, and as such has become a little uncaring, more from a habit of keeping people at an emotional arms-length than anything else. But Salford, like Darcy, is not arrogant in the usual sense of the word.

"Sylvester, who did not arrive at parties very late, take his bored leave within half an hour of his arrival, leave invitations unanswered, stare unrecognizingly at one of his tenants, or fail to exchange a few words with every one of his guests on public days at Chance, was not very likely to believe that a charge of arrogance levelled against him was anything but a calumny."

Needless to say, Sylvester's character is vastly intriguing – arrogant, yet not in the usual style, and unable to realize that arrogance goes a little deeper than the above description. Sylvester clearly needs to learn, as he does over the course of the novel, that nobility is more than skin-deep; it is more than simply acting in order to sustain the view that others have of your supposedly noble character. He was a little uncaring, but still able to joke and sometimes act kindly on an impulse. In other words, he was temperamental, a quality which I actually quite like. There were three other things that endeared him to me, in these first chapters. First was his easy, very loving relationship with his Mama, about whom I shall speak later. Secondly, I liked his clear intelligence, and his consequent ability to deliver very amusing, very witty retorts. And thirdly was his affection for his little nephew, Edmund, which becomes even more apparent later on in the story.

Here again I found a strong resemblance to Mr Darcy: even when Darcy still seemed a bit proud, I'm sure many readers – not just me – are very much touched by the way he loves and dotes upon his sister Georgiana. The same was true of Sylvester, and remembering his attitude towards his nephew was something I had to make myself remember, later in the novel, during times when it seemed that Sylvester did not have very many qualities about him that I could like.

Where the “Darcy Simile” falls down rather heavily is in the character of Sylvester's mother, Elizabeth, the Duchess of Salford. The only character she could really be compared to in *Pride and Prejudice* is Lady Catherine, and while I despise Lady Catherine, I don't think I've ever felt such affection for a character as I have for the Duchess of Salford. Oh, of course I have fallen in love with a great many heroes, and felt for many heroines as I would for a sister, but there have not, I believe, been any secondary characters which I hold in more affection and esteem than this lovely woman.

Sylvester's Mama is kept in relative seclusion due to an arthritic complaint, and yet unlike so many other Regency ladies, she does not ask anyone to pity her, and actually contrives to exist in perfect happiness, with her relatives and her novels to occupy her. Aside from her admirable strength, her love for her son is so very clear, she is well-informed with a sharp intellect, and perhaps one of the kindest women I have ever read about. I felt sorry for her, being so disquieted by the suspicion that her son had become arrogant. And it brought tears to my eyes when at one point in the novel – I shan't say when – she addresses young Phoebe Marlowe with such tender affection that Phoebe, never having encountered such affection before, falls to her knees next to Sylvester's mama, and cries her poor little heart out.

In any case, after those first few chapters of the book involving Sylvester and his mother, the story moves to focus upon the heroine, Miss Phoebe Marlowe. There was a period of time upon first encountering the heroine that I found the novel to be *almost* dull. It was for, shall we say, a period of about twenty minutes to half an hour in audiobook terms, and not even Richard Armitage's dulcet tones could keep me from becoming just the slightest bit bored. Though undoubtedly a lovely girl with a pleasant talent for writing and an unfortunate tendency to allow herself to be oppressed by her family, there was – at least to begin with - very little in Phoebe Marlowe's character to recommend her to me. And upon the Duke of Salford arriving to visit her, and seeing his behaviour, I came to the uncomfortable conclusion that I did not – for the moment – very much like either of the main characters in the novel, though both had redeeming features which gave me some hope.

One character I did really like was Tom, Phoebe's childhood friend. He was an honourable, blunt young man, with an incredibly loyal heart, and not afraid of plain speaking, even when it would get him into trouble. He made me laugh, especially when he told Phoebe that they must run away, as a Gretna Green marriage was the only thing that could save her, and then asked her what in the world she was laughing at. Of course, what Phoebe is trying to escape from is the threat of being married to the Duke of Salford, as her foolish father and overbearing stepmother have told her that this evidently insufferably proud man came to visit them in order to propose to her. But her plan is rather more sensible than Tom's; she decides to go to her grandmother – also, incidentally, Sylvester's godmother – in London. So off they go, and accidentally overturn Tom's fathers' curricule, breaking poor Tom's leg in the process. And of course, who should find

them trapped at a country inn? Yes, awkwardly enough, it is the Duke of Salford.

I shan't give too much away about the plot from there, but suffice it to say that Phoebe and Tom come to know and like Sylvester, during the time they are trapped at the inn, due to the snow. Sylvester's brand of arrogance becomes very clearly defined during his stay at the country inn, but so too does his wonderful sense of humour, his charm, and the kindness that he does indeed possess, brought out a little more than usual by Miss Phoebe Marlowe. I really came to like Sylvester – and Phoebe – in this part of the book. However, there was one particular part - after Tom tells Sylvester that Phoebe was running away from the actually non-existent threat of an offer from the Duke – where I truly wanted to slap Sylvester, I was so angry at his despicable, vengeful thought;

“He became possessed of a strong desire to teach Miss Marlowe a lesson. What was it Tom had said? Nothing would induce her to marry you? A little too cocksure, Miss Marlowe. The opportunity will not be granted you. But let us see if you can be made to feel sorry.”

Oh, how that made my blood boil. What a despicable, unworthy, cruel thought! But in all other respects Sylvester's behaviour is perfectly amiable, teasing and amusing, so I was eventually able to forgive him his transgression in that area. One woman whose attitude I find very hard to forgive or even to tolerate, was the character of Lady Ianthe Rayne. Ianthe was the wife of Sylvester's twin brother, who died right after his son Edmund was born. At first I was indignant about the idea that Sylvester should expect such a young lady never to go out into society or marry again.

I was even more indignant at the thought of her being separated from her young child; Sylvester being Edmund's guardian and insisting he be raised at Chance, even if Ianthe should remarry and move away. However, upon learning *who* she wanted to marry, and learning of how little real, unselfish affection she had for her child, I found it very hard to retain any sympathy for her. In all fairness I must say there was very little harm in her, in that she doesn't mean to hurt others, but she's one of those typical, weak, silly Regency ladies I find it hard not to despise. Again though, in all fairness, there was no real malice in her, so I could like her... just a little.

Anyway, eventually Phoebe arrives in London, and out of the way of her despicable, cruel stepmother, Phoebe's character really begins to flower. She is smart, precocious, unfailingly kind, and a very honourable little thing. I loved reading of her and of Sylvester in London, but unfortunately Phoebe manages to get herself into such a scrape that I was alternately holding my breath in anxiety for her, and trying not to cry for her pain. I will say – trying not to give anything away – that there is a time, in London, when Sylvester is unspeakably and deliberately cruel to poor Miss Marlowe. I felt very much for both of them, understanding his anger and her true regret and sorrow, but deliberate cruelty is one of the few things I find it very, very hard to forgive. What he says to her has me in tears every single time. The combination of Georgette's flawless writing and the brilliant way in which Richard reads the scene is perfectly calculated to shatter my poor heart with sympathy and sorrow; mostly for Phoebe, but also for Sylvester.

Well now, that's all I can really say without spoiling anything major, but I cannot resist talking about the final events of the novel, especially as they give me such a lovely opportunity to further my “Darcy Simile”. So, without further ado...

(view spoiler)

I think I have now said all I need to say about *Sylvester*; well, you would have to hope so, wouldn't you, after I've carried on so? So I will finish simply by saying that the perfect elegance of Georgette Heyer's writing never fails to amaze me, her characters are so well drawn that you cannot help but feel something towards all

of them, and there is nothing so beautiful as the emotion that comes pouring through these pages. Richard Armitage reads extremely well, as always, and listening to him read *Sylvester* was very pleasant. Anyone who loves Georgette Heyer's work – or indeed, Regency romances – would do well to read *Sylvester*. I won't deny it has its low points, but in the end, it is just as worthy of praise as any other of Heyer's beautiful novels.

Andrea (Catsos Person) is a Compulsive eBook Hoarder says

This time, I listened to the eAudio from Hoopla. I own the Sourcebooks dead tree edition and later bought the kindle edition at a steep price reduction.

Pre-GR, I discovered Georgette Heyer and this was the very first of her books that I read. I remember that breathily hyperventilated, panted and was extraordinarily exhilarated as I read this. It was THAT good the first time I read this book and the pages turned themselves. This book, unlike others of Georgette Heyer's that are my favorites, I have read comparatively few times. I think this is perhaps only the fifth time I've read this. This time around I listened to the eAudio edition.

I admit that I missed some things on that first reading. I missed what would be in my top 4 most romantic and moving expressions of feeling in my romance reading. Two others that moved me in this way are in M/M Romance books. The other in *Wuthering Heights*. Here it is folks, tympani please:

1) The hero, upon acknowledgement of her fine seat on a horse as one of the best (the heroine would rather stay in the stable hobnobbing with stable hands than attending a ball), asking the heroine if she would do the honor of allowing him to mount her (provide her with a horse to ride, because the one provided by her relatives is a spiritless shuffling creature). The heroine refuses (probably for reasons of propriety). The hero has a special mare of playfulness and spirit, and promptly has it bought to London and asks his married cousin Georgiana to offer to let the heroine ride her (Georgiana's) "spare" horse.

That's it y'all, it's in my top four of the most romantic things I've ever read in the totality of my romance reading.

The hero's mother is simply the loveliest mother to be found in any of Georgette Heyer's romances. If the mother is alive at all, they are often contemptibly silly creatures. But the Duchess of Salford, the hero's mother is just lovely, classy, gracious and loving. The hero has some character flaws (that the heroine is always pointing out!) but has a beautiful relationship with his mother.

This is possibly the very first romance to use what we would today call the *Pride and Prejudice* trope. Georgette Heyer was possibly the first HR author to borrow/find inspiration from P/P.

2) The heroine's invitation from the hero's mother and their meeting/discussion at the end of the book was so lovely to listen to in this audiobook that I cried through it.

Jessica says

Have read this before, love the fact that she is a secret authoress whose very first book has landed her in trouble. Love *Sylvester*, his devotion to his mother, and his aloofness.

Just listened to it as an audiobook because it was narrated by RICHARD ARMITAGE. YES, MR. THORNTON! And he was great, and I want him to do more!

Cait • A Page with a View says

I 100% listened to this because the audiobook was narrated by Richard Armitage. And I really just want to fill this review with Richard Armitage gifs, which probably isn't the most helpful thing ever.

I think I liked the arrogant Sylvester? He reminded me a lot of Mr. Darcy at times... especially with the awkward proposal. Basically, if you like historical fiction/romance then this is another good story!

But ok seriously, listen to the audiobook. I'm not a fan of audiobooks in general, but the narration is amazing and Richard Armitage does a range of hilarious voices.

... did I mention Richard Armitage.

Jan130 says

4.5 stars. What a wonderful writer Georgette Heyer was. This book was first published in 1957, but is still fresh, amusing and moving. It doesn't feel dated, except I suppose that many HRs these days are a lot more explicit in the sensuality level and the inclusion of sex scenes. But you don't even notice the lack of this as you read this lively and charming book.

The story centres around Sylvester, Duke of Salford, who appears to have everything. One of society's most desirable bachelors. He is slightly aloof in manner, but always well-mannered and well-bred in his behaviour. And he is looking for a suitable wife, in a fairly cold-blooded manner.

Phoebe is not considered beautiful, but she is very clever, with a quick wit and a lively mind. But she is also easily overborne by stronger personalities, like her stepmother who bullies her mercilessly, in the name of raising Phoebe to have 'good ton'.

It seems an unlikely match.

The plot moves quickly, and several secondary characters play key roles, including Phoebe's (brotherly) friend Tom, who is a delightful young man. There is also Ianthe, the beautiful but self-centred sister of Sylvester's deceased twin Harry. There is Ianthe and Harry's little son (and Sylvester's nephew) Edmund. There is Sylvester's sensitive and sweet mother, who is confined to a chair by a disability. And there is the wonderful caricature, Sir Nugent Fotherby. Nugent is seeking to marry Ianthe, and as readers see more of him, his splendour and ridiculousness shine through. Heyer depicts these kinds of character so well. They are hilariously exaggerated, but also believable.

Phoebe and Sylvester do fall deeply in love with each other, but it is a rocky and adventurous path to their HEA. There is a comedy of errors over a book written secretly by Phoebe, an enforced stay at an inn during a snowstorm, a broken leg, road trips, boat trips, a dramatic scene at a ball, and and a wonderful finale when the confusion is finally over and Phoebe and Sylvester are together.

Heyer does not spend a lot of time on flowery descriptions. Her plots move along quickly and carry you with

them, wanting to know what will happen next! She quickly sketches her characters with a light touch, but it's done so effectively. Sylvester's grief over the loss of his loved twin brother is only touched on lightly a few times, but it's so moving, and you feel his pain and grief. Then there's the anguish felt by both Phoebe and Sylvester at that dramatic moment when they argue at a ball, which really hits home to the reader. You feel their anger and pain. And when Phoebe finally admits all to the Duke's mother, again it's quite moving.

This was a book I loved as a teenager, and I hadn't read it for quite a while, so it felt fresh all over again. Whilst it's not my top favourite Heyer HR, it's still a wonderful read. Don't let its age put you off. Masterful writing, a lovely love story, great secondary characters and the amusing Nugent Fotherby. Very enjoyable.

Hana says

Three and a half stars, rounded up. I had mixed feelings about Sylvester. I thought the plot dragged a bit in some spots and got a bit overwrought in others, but the two lead characters carried the book for me, and on balance I've begun to think this might be one of Heyer's most psychologically astute romances.

While I normally find it hard to warm up to Heyer's arrogant nobleman protagonists, I actually started to like Sylvester right from the moment on page three when he sees the 'small scampering figure' of his young nephew escaping from his nurse and tutor. Sylvester's internal debate about whether to lean out the window to wish Edmund success in his adventure is full of humor, sensitivity and an acute understanding of the family dynamics. But he's not easy for people to get close to, and we gradually learn why as the book progresses. I particularly enjoyed Sylvester's relationship with his mother, the Duchess; she plays a role in three pivotal scenes and her gentle wisdom makes all the difference for our hero and heroine.

Phoebe, the heroine, reminded me a bit of Catherine Moreland in *Northanger Abbey*--she has such a vivid imagination and it sometimes runs away with her. But while Catherine Moreland spends her time *reading* trashy romantic novels (and getting into trouble because of them), Phoebe has spent her time *writing* one and the novel-within-a-novel theme is so much fun!

Phoebe fascinated me. She has clearly been suffering all her life from verbal abuse and neglect and yet she has retained (or probably better, restrained) a wicked sense of humor, quick understanding, more than a bit of a temper, and a sharp tongue.

Had she had a wiser, more understanding family, those traits might have been gently guided and softened. As it is, her step-mother simply clamped a lid on Phoebe and sealed her shut like a pressure cooker, and poor Phoebe really has only her BFF young Tom Orde with whom to let off steam. I suppose Miss Battery is of some help, but she seems rather emotionally undeveloped. One more thing about Phoebe that rather amazed me: she is still capable of real compassion and kindness, despite everything that the adults in her life have done--and failed to do for her.

I would have liked a little more sweetness and light, but I think Sylvester and Phoebe are both really wounded and the bickering is part of the way they fight through their blocks: Sylvester is naturally reserved and has a protective shell he's worn since his brother died and Phoebe has all the accumulated hurts and hypersensitivity and awkwardness of years of isolation. Love and trust can't possibly come easily for either of them.

Sylvester's scene with his mother towards the end of the book is wonderful, and I loved the intelligent and sensitive way that she intervenes to set Phoebe and Sylvester on the right course. The Duchess is the wisest person that Phoebe has ever had in her life and I think that if this marriage succeeds it will be in no small

way due to her.

Content Rating G: A clean read.

Read with the Georgette Heyer Fans group, which added so much to my appreciation!

<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>

? Irena ? says

3.5

Sylvester, Duke of Salford, cannot believe that anyone might not want to marry him. It is one of basic premises in this story. The greatest problem Sylvester has is that nobody has ever talked back or found fault in anything he has done. I spent part the book wanting him to be rebuffed and another being annoyed by Phoebe.

Sylvester mocks a fairy tale prince, but turns into one the moment he sees someone needs help.

They don't meet right away in the book. The first two or three chapters are introduction to Sylvester, his family and their personal issues. What is different in this story is that one of the first conflicts happens pretty early. It left me dreading the expected mopping and whining. Fortunately, that doesn't happen.- As soon as one conflict happens, it gets resolved, the story moves to something new.

From Phoebe's silent and obedient girl act when they meet to her attempt at escape to an unexpected sea adventure, it is never boring. I can understand why people like it. It has a bit of *Pride and Prejudice* in it, a bit of humour and two very stubborn characters. Both Phoebe and Sylvester had to learn a couple of new things to move forward.

The Grand Sophy is still my favourite.
