



A Scandalous Wager

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As the Black Raven, she's cold, distant and alone...untouched by the gossip and scorn of her aristocratic peers. Until he enters her house — and her life — then suddenly her icy shell is no match for the heat of attraction...

Notorious Widow Lisbeth Carslake, Countess of Blackhurst was acquitted of her husband's murder, but no one believes in her innocence. Known as the Black Raven, bringer of bad luck and death, she is eviscerated by the gossips and mocked in the clubs.

She's also the subject of London's most scandalous wager.

Oliver Whitely, Earl of Bellamy, needs money, but it takes more than a few drinks to take on The Black Raven Wager. He finds himself drunk, at her house, and—more surprisingly—agreeing to a business proposal at the end of a fire poker.

She will let him win the wager, and he will help find her husband's killer before the killer finds her. But business agreements don't mean trust, and Lisbeth certainly doesn't trust Oliver, her body's reaction to him, or her heart.

Love may be the biggest gamble of their lives, but is it a wager their hearts can afford to lose?

A Scandalous Wager Details

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From Reader Review A Scandalous Wager for online ebook

Bree T says

Lisbeth Carslake, the Countess of Blackhurst is a notorious figure. She was acquitted of the murder of her husband, the Earl of Blackhurst, getting off on a technicality. There are many among the ton who do not believe that she was innocent and that it's a travesty that she's still a free woman. She is known as the Black Raven and is the subject of malicious rumour and gossip in all of the clubs. She is also the subject of many wagers.

Oliver Whitely has recently become the Earl of Bellamy after the untimely death of his older brother. The family seat is almost broke and Oliver desperately needs money in order to keep things going. Although he doesn't want to be the Earl and is finding the idea that he is hard to reconcile with, he also knows that he must do his best to fix the mess that his brother unfortunately left behind – much of which is tied up with the Countess Blackhurst. Oliver's brother invested with the Countess's late husband and she has not refunded the investments after his death.

A little drunk, Oliver decides to take on the Black Raven wagers in order to get some money – he also wants to find out more about her and he unexpectedly finds himself agreeing to a business proposal that Lisbeth offers. He will accompany her in society so that she can seek out the real killer of her husband and in return she will confirm that he is the recipient of all of the wagers concerning her. But when the attraction begins to simmer between them, things start to get a little complicated. Add in the danger of someone who doesn't want to be discovered and things get very complicated.

I'm reading so much historical romance at the moment, I'm almost automatically drawn to them now. There's something about the formula that is really appealing to me at the moment. I've always read a lot of contemporary romance but the historical trend in my reading has only started in the last couple of years or so. This one has some good points and some not so good points.

Firstly, I liked Lisbeth quite a bit. She's had a horrible time of it the past few years. She was married to a terrible man, an abusive man and in some ways the fact hasn't always made her life easier. She's been shunned by her own family and society in general. She was charged with the murder but acquitted somehow on a technicality and now she lives in relative seclusion some two years later. People have tried to visit her, mostly men who think they might be able to woo a lonely widow (and potential murderess) in order to collect on the vicious wagers that are pledged in clubs. Lisbeth has decided that the only way she can clear her name is to find out the identity of the real murderer, and to do that she must re-enter society and she needs an escort, someone to provide her with cover and support given most, if not all other people will shun her.

Although I understood Oliver's motives for approaching her and agreeing to be a part of the plan, I have to admit I didn't really warm to him as a character and I never particularly really felt their attraction much. He does have relatively good connections and he's personally invested in finding the murderer as well, considering he may receive back some of the family fortune by working with Lisbeth if it can be proven how much that his brother invested. Most of the time though he felt a bit extraneous to the plot, like he wasn't really necessary for anything to move forward. And although Lisbeth is supposedly shunned by all, it doesn't really feel like people are that scandalised by their appearance at social events. Given Oliver is almost broke it's unlikely he has enough social clout to smooth the way that much.

The most disappointing aspect of the story and the weakest in my opinion, is who the murderer is. It's glaringly obvious from the very first time they appear on the page and it seems to take an age before Lisbeth

and Oliver realise who it is and even then they basically only realise because he tells them (Lisbeth) and someone else gives Oliver the information he needs to put it all together. The story never really attained the level of suspense I felt it should, particularly in the scenes of the final confrontation. Likewise some of the scenes between Lisbeth and her husband which are shown in flashback, lack the emotional impact that scenes of that nature should.

All in all, this was an okay read – I enjoyed certain aspects of it but there were others that didn't really resonate with me.

Sue Gerhardt Griffiths says

This is a nice light historical romance.

Cassandra Samuels has given the reader some wonderful and delightful characters in her debut novel *A Scandalous Wager*.

Oliver had me in stitches when he entered the scene at the beginning of the story. I do love a book with humour and the more laugh out loud moments the better - and there were plenty of those. The banter between Lisbeth and Oliver was amusing and the more time they spent together a romance developed between them. - It was quite endearing.

All characters were likeable even the grandmother and sister who turned against Lisbeth after she was accused of murdering her husband, eventually they felt ashamed for abandoning her at a time she needed them the most. Kudos to Ms Samuels for having Lisbeth forgive her family - always lovely to read happy words rather than bitter ones.

Well, I have to mention, it had me beat who the killer was, I even made a list of names who I thought it could be, shocked to find I got it wrong. Well done, Cassie, for keeping me guessing and madly flipping the pages until the murderer was revealed and at that moment I was able to breathe again and relax into the last bit of the story. Loved the ending, came together quite nicely.

Maria says

Lisbeth Carslake is the widowed Countess of Blackhurst, infamously and unkindly known as the Black Raven ("the bringer of bad luck and death"). She is vulnerable yet she displays an inner strength and fortitude that has seen her weather the scandal of her husband Nathaniel's murder. She was accused and acquitted by the courts but, after two years of ostracization, she is isolated beyond belief. She has lived in the shadow of the scandal with bad memories of her terrifying marriage.

But she decides to change her life for the better when she determines to find the identity of the killer so that she can clear her good name and live her own life free of scandal and debilitating sadness. Her domestic life is comfortable financially, due to the questionable financial speculations Nathaniel was involved in, and she has the support of her loyal servants, Rollands, her faithful butler and his wife, the housekeeper. I like the way that Cassandra Samuels depicts the depth of Lisbeth's painful psyche. I felt for her but don't feel sorry for her and I admire her resolve to make her life better.

For my full review on my historical romance and history blog: <http://bit.ly/1O1Dsbp>

Helen says

This is such a great story Oliver has come home to take the place of his brother Henry who died in a horse riding accident and is now the Earl of Bellamy and bankrupt because of a speculation that Henry invested in, Lisbeth has been through so much accused of murdering her husband Lord Blackhurst who was cruel and led the speculation although she was found not guilty for years she has been known as the Black Raven and kept to herself but she has decided to finally come out and find out who killed her husband but she needs help and Oliver is the one she finally allows through her door to win the wagers that have been put up by the ton. The banter between Lisbeth and Oliver will keep you smiling as they journey to a HEA that is sensual and heartwarming with danger thrown in and Oliver's Aunt Petunia adds a lot to the story. Oliver is such a caring hero one that I would die for don't miss this one I highly recommend it I loved it.

Dianne says

Love may be the biggest gamble of their lives...

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Cassandra is offering an eCopy of A SCANDALOUS WAGER

Ends April 23, 2015

International where allowed

The Ton calls her the Black Raven, but do they know what the Countess of Blackhurst went through before her husband's mysterious murder? On the outside, ice runs through her veins, but what is happening to the hot-blooded woman within? Lisbeth has become a pariah, even though she was innocent of her husband's death and his shady dealings. Now she has become the object of a cruel wager, set forth by the irresponsible and wealthy "men" of London.

The Earl of Bellamy has just ascended to his title after the death of his brother, only to find the family fortunes are gone. Oliver, an unknowing pawn of the infamous wager sees a way to gain some coin to pay his bills without London's Society learning of his predicament. He is to gain entry into the Black Raven's home and actually speak with her. What happens becomes a game of who's fooling who and the stakes are getting high as she bargains with him to become her escort for the season. Little did they know they were playing with fire as her reasons are revealed and their business arrangement takes on a much more personal note.

A Scandalous Wager by Cassandra Samuels is NOT your ordinary, cookie cutter historical romance among London's High Society wagging tongues. One crass wager, two people with their own secret needs, some intrigue, some heartache and oh, let's not forget the brilliant banter between Lisbeth and Oliver! Fast-paced, wicked clever and one of the best historical romances I have read. There is a unique feel to **A Scandalous Wager**, is it the light tone it often resonates between the stuffiness of the Ton? Could it be the sheer audacity of Oliver to find rakish humor and want upon seeing Lisbeth's wrath? Maybe it's the intelligence and grit of Lisbeth that does it. Whatever it is, Cassandra Samuels has put some spark into this historical romance that ignites in passion, love and brilliant adventures for two outcasts, proving that when you least expect it, anyone can find love!

I received this copy from Cassandra Samuels in exchange for my honest review.

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Trish R. says

Really good book..

By 3% I had to stop at least 4 times to laugh out loud at Oliver's silly drunken thoughts, then again at his funny thoughts when he had a hangover. And I like the fact that he was a pretty happy guy while Lisbeth was kind of snarky, because of the beatings she took from her late husband. She did feel a lot of desire for Oliver but she was always wondering if he'd be just like Nathaniel had been. The episode in the wardrobe was kinda steamy, but left unfinished, which I loved. Always leave 'em wanting.

Her grandmother? What a biotch. I would never have forgiven her no matter what! Nor, Lisbeth's sister, either. Family, back then, didn't mean much, just your status in the "ton." Even after all was forgiven I still couldn't like the grandmother or Marie. They snubbed her when they were really needed and that's all I could see. I liked Tony, too. He seemed like a good friend. It was pretty obvious who the killer was but it was still a good story.

And her obsession with her watch and the clocks in the house. She drove me nuts, right along with Oliver. The main thing wrong with this book was the lack of dialogue then 18, 20, 25 pages of just telling a story or someone's inner thoughts. That's when I find myself skimming. It was a good story but it just needed someone talking more often. That being said, I can't see myself reading anything else by this author, if she writes another book. I like the players to be involved, not someone telling me a story.

One BAD thing about this book was that when someone spoke there were NEVER quotation marks. Everything said began and ended in an apostrophe. It threw me off for a while but I finally got used to it. I guess that's how they do it in Australia, I don't know.

The sexual tension between Oliver and Lisbeth was just awesome, along with the sex they had.

***The Angry Reader* says**

It was interesting to read this just after the Suzanne Enoch of the same general plot line - investigating the death of a husband. Where the Enoch was full-bodied and interesting this lacked action, character development and forward progress. We spent the entire book in the heads of two not-so-captivating characters - and their constant thoughts became painful bludgeons. I just wanted something to actually happen.

Dana aka ♥Belladonna♥ says

3.75 Stars

Nicole Laverdure says

Dark and fascinating historical romance to discover!

A Scandalous Wager is a dark romantic story written by new to me author Cassandra Samuels! I love stories with tormented souls, such as the heroine in this story. It tells the story of widow Lisbeth Carslake, AKA the Black Raven and Oliver Whitely, Earl of Bellamy. Since the death of her husband, she needs to prove her innocence if she wants to find peace and move on with her life. In need of money, Oliver, will accept a wager that will send him directly to the Black Raven's home. But instead, Lisbeth will offer him another deal, by helping her, to find the person responsible for the death of her late husband. Will she trust him, enough to offer him her heart too? The story is well written with a well developed plot. Betrayal, lies, trust and romance makes A Scandalous Wager interesting to read!

D.w. says

As a reviewer for RRM I get books sometimes that are out of my period, and sometimes those that are within it. This happily was within it. Yet as the historian in me looks at the work, set in the mid teens, I find little to place this in historical context. It is the Regency, George the Prince of Wales acting as Regent for his mad father. (Waltzes at balls prevalent instead of a novelty in the mid teens still something the historian in me and my research are at odds with. 1814 was the start of such at Almacks and before that, only the fast set of Devonshire practiced it privately.)

I found less than a handful of items that took me out of the story, such as 'Time flies when you are having fun' an expression that seems very modern to my mind. And aside from spending a great deal of time thinking about the attitude of the ton, I did not feel all that much that we were in the Regency. This was billed to us as the first work of the author, and that I think is where we could have seen something stronger. The author also when Hero and Heroine are within a scene, jumps POV paragraph to paragraph. That is confusing as well.

We had all fictitious characters sprinkled about, and then one inhabiting a house on Grosvenor Square. Certainly very expensive property. The plot device (I too have used the idea of a gambling as has Cartland) to bring our romance about. Here, the author started a little late I think. Especially as she wanted to use the title effectively. Would not baiting the hook of this Scandalous Wager be more appropriate to set us up. Often we lose track that the wager is a thing between our lovers except at that last moment when a device is needed to force them apart.

Then we have a mystery that is to be solved, but as we search for clues, it seems that none are ever found because our sleuths are interrupted. So they just have a list if possible suspects. That it is not shared very much with the reader forces us to realize far too early that the criminal being sought is readily apparent. We as an audience do not have enough confusion to make it not evident.

Put that aside and we delve into the romance of the piece, for often in a bodice ripper, that is what the audience is looking for. The Plot, character development secondary. Here, the heroine has had a few years to separate the abuse she had at her late husband aside so that when our Hero begins to make his own amorous advances, she is ready to respond. She has doubts, but the pace for her to succumb to those advances, fans of bodice rippers, and lovemaking scenes should not find themselves disappointed. The author provides titillation and an ebb and flow to this romance that should provide sustenance, though others might have seen dangling the reward of sexual congress till the resolution of the story which is to be the vindication of our heroine.

The flaws I have noted, that detract for me, cause me to rate this as middle of the road. I think that Ms Samuels shows promise and with work on plot and regency scene setting further developed, her work could become very strong indeed.

Malvina says

There is a new hero in town: Oliver, the Earl of Bellamy, freshly returned from the war to take up the reigns after his brother Henry's accidental death. To his dismay there are suspicions raised about said death, pointing towards the Black Raven: Lisbeth Carslake, Countess of Blackhurst, who was tried and then acquitted of her husband's murder. But there are still ugly murmurs about the Black Raven, and some of them involve not only murder but money and greed...

The night Oliver gains access (on a wager) to the Black Raven's house opens the novel. Given the dark nature of things, this first meeting is surprisingly fresh and comic. Oliver is totally foxed, but still conscious enough to be quite endearing and witty. And he continues to be, right through the book. He is strong enough to be protective, man enough to cope with the 'Black Raven' rumours as he escorts Lisbeth through the *ton*, and generous with his honest affections. Lisbeth, on the other hand, comes from a shockingly damaged background and is very guarded. Every reader's heart will go out to her. I know mine did. I loved watching these two find their HEA, and can't wait for the next Cassandra Samuels!

Sasha Cottman says

This book had some very interesting elements which I found appealing. I really enjoyed that the author delved into the life that society had forced upon the widow known as the Black Raven. The price she had been forced to pay for her late husband's evil deeds was woven nicely throughout the story. A well written love story which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Gio says

They Call Her The Black Raven

Lisbeth Our Heroine Is Rumored To Have Killed Her Husband

Oliver Is The Lucky Man To Win A Wager To Lure The Black Raven Outside

Mystery

Witty Banter

Silver Tongued Hero

Intelligent Strong-Minded Heroine

Learning To Trust

Seduction

Unfolding Secrets

Dual POV

No OW/OM Drama

The Writing And Conversations Are Fantastic

Inner Dialogue Became Too Much For Me

JoRead says

I always enjoy stories that not only provide witty banter, feasible storylines, charming yet virile heroes, and of course determined, strong heroines. I am delighted to say this story filled all my requirements for a great story. Oliver, Earl of Bellamy, wages that he will be able to get inside the Black Raven's threshold and then leave as if nothing had happened. However once inside he encounters a beautiful but steely woman that proposes to spare his dignity in exchange to help her find the killer of her husband so she can finally find some peace.

"A demon faced is a demon vanquished."

Ever since she was accused of her husband's murder, Lisbeth hasn't had a moment of happiness. Every single one of her friends and family members deserted her. Thus, when she enlists the help of Bellamy, she does so knowing she cannot fully trust him. Meanwhile, Bellamy keeps hearing so many appalling things about her that he's not quite sure she's as innocent as she may want him to think. I loved the chemistry between these two. Lisbeth was forced to become this person that she obviously didn't like being but had no other choice but to be, she just became too used to wearing her façade so as not to be hurt, so as not to feel pain. I'll admit there were times she sounded a bit too cold and unemotional towards him but once they get closer and in more, ahem, amiable terms *wink wink* she became the woman capable of love she once was.

Although Bellamy could be considered a rake by the standards of the time (he accepted a scandalous wager after all) was always on point as a gentleman but also enjoyed playing the devilish rogue that brought all of Lisbeth's defenses down and that made him the perfect hero to me.

“Now he knew there was so much more to her story and damn if he didn't want to read the whole book.”

The suspense although important is not the main focus of the story as it primarily revolves around Bellamy and Lisbeth's relationship. Each of their backstories bring so many great things to the story as a whole that it does feel a little incomplete when the story ends and you feel wanting to know more about all the other characters in the story. All in all a great and enjoyable read and I will definitely will read more from this author.

** I was gifted a copy of this story from the author in exchange for an honest review **

Mandi Schreiner says

Lisbeth, Countess Blackthorn was found not guilty of killing her husband in court, but that doesn't mean society believes of her innocence. Known as The Black Raven, when her husband was found dead in their home three years ago, he not only left behind his wife, but he left behind a lot of angry investors. Blackthorn was known for making money – a lot of money and right before his death, he convinced a lot of people to invest a lot of money into a speculation – only it ended up being a fake speculation and many were left with nothing. Lisbeth however, was left all of her husband's money and not everyone is happy about it. She has barely left her house in the past three years.

She had an abusive marriage, so Lisbeth was not too upset when her husband was found dead. Because she is such a recluse, wagers have been set up in gaming hells to offer money to those who actually make it over her threshold. Which is how we find our hero, Oliver Bellamy, sitting on her door step, drunk and in the freezing cold, hoping her butler will let him in. Oliver's brother died around the time of the failed speculation, leaving Oliver an Earl...and with a heap of debt. Only having a beloved elderly aunt as family, Oliver doesn't have many he can turn to for advice. So he decides to be the one that will cross into Lisbeth's house, win the wager and help pay off some debt. When her butler finally lets him in, he can't believe it.

Lisbeth wants to track down the real killer of her husband, but to do that she must re-enter society. She decides the poor Oliver who is camped out front will do. She offers him money from future wages against her, to accompany her for a few weeks to balls and certain events. He agrees, and off they go.

I really enjoyed both Lisbeth and Oliver – they have nice banter in this book. Lisbeth is strong-willed, smart, and not too afraid to take on those who think she is a murderer. Her husband not only hit her, but verbally abused her too. He was truly a horrible man. She still lives with the mental scars and it's hard for her to overcome them. When she first meets Oliver, she is taken back by how handsome he is. Of course, he was totally drunk during their first meeting too, which makes her think twice about the man she chooses to help her. And although she tries so hard not to let her eyes roam, sometimes she just can't help herself.

On more than one occasion he had sighed and shifted in his seat, causing her to look at other parts of him. Parts she definitely should not have been looking at. She should not care one wit he had powerful looking thighs or that his legs seemed to stretch a considerable length ending in incredibly large shoes or a the fall of his trousers it seemed there was hardly enough room for what lay beneath. She'd felt heat rise from her throat to her cheeks and had fanned herself furiously, vowing never to look at him again. After another guilty look she realised how ridiculous her first vow had been and amended it to, not look at him again until the

performance was over. She failed miserably at that vow too. By the end of the performance her sinful mind had memorised every inch of him.

Oliver started out a bit silly – he unabashedly flirts with Lisbeth and gives her a good-natured hard time. Walking into a ball with her on his arm gets everyone in a tizzy, which he finds quite amusing. What I really liked about their relationship is how loved he makes Lisbeth feel. He is such a good guy, and makes her feel special and warm and attractive – and I liked how he slowly removed her past demons. At times he may have pushed a little too hard, especially with her abusive background, but he made me smile and laugh overall.

I do wish the hunt for the murderer had taken on a bit more of a faster pace. Lisbeth and Oliver's banter is great, but at times I wanted a little more suspense. The end reveal of the bad guy isn't all that revealing as well.

But this author has a nice voice. I will definitely read something else by her.

Grade: B
