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The American Heiress: A Novel



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Synopsis

"Anyone suffering Downton Abbey withdrawal symptoms (who isn't?) will find an instant tonic in Daisy Goodwin's The American Heiress. The story of Cora Cash, an American heiress in the 1890s who bags an English duke, this is a deliciously evocative first novel that lingers in the mind." (Allison Pearson, New York Times best-selling author of I Don't Know How She Does It and I Think I Love You) This program includes a bonus chapter of Victoria, the latest novel from author Daisy Goodwin, the creator and writer of the new PBS/Masterpiece drama of the same name. Be careful what you wish for. Traveling abroad with her mother at the turn of the 20th century to seek a titled husband, beautiful, vivacious Cora Cash, whose family mansion in Newport dwarfs the Vanderbilts', suddenly finds herself Duchess of Wareham, married to Ivo, the most eligible bachelor in England. Nothing is quite as it seems, however: Ivo is withdrawn and secretive, and the English social scene is full of traps and betrayals. Money, Cora soon learns, cannot buy everything, as she must decide what is truly worth the price in her life and her marriage. Witty, moving, and brilliantly entertaining, Cora's story marks the debut of a glorious storyteller who brings a fresh new spirit to the world of Edith Wharton and Henry James. "For daughters of the new American billionaires of the 19th century, it was the ultimate deal: marriage to a cash-strapped British Aristocrat in return for a title and social status. But money didn't always buy them happiness." (Daisy Goodwin in The Daily Mail) One of Library Journal's Best Historical Fiction Books of 2011

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First of all, I'd like to preface my review by saying that I never really understand when reviewers say

things like "I'll never get that time back" when criticizing a book that's meant to be entertainment. Unless something is a school assignment, is necessary for continued participation in a book club, or a threat at gunpoint is involved, why finish a book you hate? Isn't life too short to read bad books?I don't consider myself a "quitter" when I choose not to finish a book; I just consider a different use of my time, because time is money. (And so are books, admittedly.) With that being said, I did finish this book, and was entertained by it. Does that make it a great book? No, but do all books have to be great literature? Let's hope not, because that would really lower the bar on what's considered great.Entertainment aside, this is a very formulaic book with a very predictable plot. The heroine is a static character, and there's a pretty poor attempt at an African-American, southern-born lady's maid -- the concept of which could have been very interesting, considering, but ends up being a fail here. Additionally, there are very modern (as in, 21st century) character views in the book which don't ring true at all for the times. Marriage for love was an anomaly; marriage for money, property or position was the norm. Things like cheating husbands, mistresses, etc., were, if carried on tastefully, not just accepted by wives, but were often even expected. Would most 21st-century women be shocked and outraged by being expected to live that way? Probably. But if you're writing a book about another era, does it make sense to plop a 21st-century woman into the center of it?Ms. Goodwin does do a fantastic job of recreating this world, in the sense of social behaviors, clothes, furniture and the like. Her atmosphere is really very good in that regard, and when details like these are used to further the sense of transportation into another time or place, I disagree with readers who dismiss these details as mere fluff. They're part of what makes this book entertaining.For entertainment's sake, "The American Heiress" lives up to its many good reviews. It is entertaining, it's a fun read, and it's an easy read. If you're a fan of this era and/or these situations, and want something autobiographical, check out "The Glitter and the Gold" by Consuelo Vanderbilt, from whose life and circumstances this book heavily borrows. For straight-up nonfiction, check out "To Marry an English Lord" by Carol McD. Wallace and Gail MacColl. For "great" literature based on this era and circumstances, try anything by Edith Wharton. But don't blame Ms. Goodwin for not being Edith Wharton.Because at the end of the day, who *is* Edith Wharton ... but Edith Wharton?

Pride and prejudice meets Twilight mixed with some Jane Eyre. But ask the bad parts of all of those. I'm pretty sure she became an outlander fan about halfway through too. It seems like she tried to pick all the iconic scenes and rewrite them. And it's worse than that sounds. Just skip this one

I usually don't read love stories but this book didn't start out as one, who maybe I should have read

the reviews more closely. I liked it because it wasn't so obvious what was going on and i found myself thinking well maybe she will lean towards this person other than the other and i didn't care who she chose. i still have a problem with the lead character always having to be just beautiful and has her act together. But since everyone in the book had the same kind of character, this time it wasn't one of my major concerns. The flaws for me was the ending, there were some things that should have been addressed but didn't. i would have changed the ending to show how the other characters turned out, not just the major characters.

I was very surprised I enjoyed this book so much. I usually stay away from romances. This book appears to be a good adaptation of society in England in the late 1800's. I do suppose they needed some way to fix up drafty ancient castles and American money did the trick. The book had good flow. I do wish we had been given more information about the characters.

I don't normally go for romance as a genre. My interest is in period/historical fiction of the not-generally romantic sort, but I figured I'd give it a go and was pleasantly surprised. A few quick observations. There are a few bloopers involving historical dates and details in some of the background. Those are mostly of the forgivable sort. One area where I do think the novel fell a bit short was in downplaying (to the point of ignoring) the very real issues involved in religiously mixed marriages back then. The Duke we are told is a Catholic. That would have created a lot of complications. Anti-Catholic bigotry was widespread on both sides of the Atlantic including in high society. And the Catholics weren't a lot better. This was long before the liberalizing influences of Vatican II. It was still all in Latin with a heavy dose of Hell fire and brimstone, especially for Protestants.On the upside I was very impressed with the ending which I realize has been singled out for criticism in some of the other reviews. As someone who is not a huge fan of the romance genre (already mentioned) but who does like historical accuracy to the extent it doesn't get overwhelming, the author got this about right.(Spoiler alert)For those who didn't like the ending, here's a flash for you. It was historically pretty much what would have been expected. This was the late 19th century, the twilight of the Victorian era. The idea that a Duchess would run off with another man (while her husband was still alive!) was beyond ridiculous. Love is nice, and people hoped for it in marriage back then just as they do now. But if that didn't come about, there were few options. Divorce was difficult and rare back then. It was also socially ruinous. If (hypothetically) she had run off with her beloved, it would have been the social equivalent to swallowing cyanide and shooting oneself at the same time. They would have been social pariahs. Not just the runaway

duchess and her lover, but all of their relations on both sides of the ocean. There would not have been a respectable house in Britain or America that would have received any of them. And no, love does not conquer all, especially in the 1890's.When a marriage turned out to be unhappy at that level of society you just gritted your teeth and carried on. Once the dynastic obligations had been fulfilled (an heir and a spare produced) it was not uncommon for an unhappy couple to seek solace in discreet affairs. This was widely tolerated in society as long as there was no scandal and any whispered gossip remained just that. The Prince of Wales was himself a notorious rake with a list of mistresses longer than my arm. But divorce and or outright marital abandonment was unthinkable because it might cause the lower classes to question their betters, specifically why they were their betters. That was not permissible under any circumstance and those who broke that rule were dealt with ruthlessly and without pity. When you married at that level of society, these things were understood.So I tip my hat to Ms. Goodwin for not ruining a decent historical novel with the introduction of a 21st century story ending in a world where that just was not ever going to happen.

This story had me guessing until the very end. It was awesome! The writing was beautiful and the storyline rich and full of unexpected twists! The characters each had things I like and didn't like about them making them much more relatable. All in all it was a great read and I would highly recommended it to someone who likes romance spiced with mystery!

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