

A Rake like You

Becky Michaels

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A Rake like You is Becky Michaels's compelling historical romance about the tormented love between two childhood friends.

Set in Regency England, the novel follows Louisa and Charles as they go from friends, to enemies, and finally to lovers in the space of seven years. When he's about to turn thirty, Charles is handsome, immature, twenty thousand pounds in debt, and hated by his entire family. As the powerful Duke of Rutley watches his every move and waits for him to pay his debts, Charles sets out to find a young lady with an impressive dowry to marry him and save his land.

Meanwhile, driven and committed Louisa manages the successful estate that her father left her. As her younger sister comes of age, Louisa finds herself away from the countryside and in the social circles of London, forced to protect her family from desperate fortune hunters who only want to court her sister for her dowry. As Charles and Louisa rekindle their old friendship, they both start to wonder if there could be something more between them.

The novel moves with speed: Louisa and Charles start off as childhood friends who pretend to be courting, and they lose touch after she decides to end their friendship. They meet again several years later. This gap in their relationship is pivotal to the plot: it provides a chance for Charles to change and grow as a man. He gives up drinking, gambling, and brothels in a bid to redeem himself and show Louisa he is worthy of her attention. The chemistry between the two is built through intimate conversations and small details of their interactions: the way Charles kisses Louisa's gloved hand for the first time, the way she feels about seeing him dancing with another woman at a party. This attentiveness results in some of the most accomplished scenes in the novel.

While the book revisits romance tropes, it does so in a fresh, innovative, and irreverent way, focusing on the characters' differences and flaws. While it is clear from the start that Louisa and Charles have strong feelings for each other, tension builds as the story develops, and new layers of doubt and uncertainty are added to their complicated relationship. Further, the cohesive mix of colloquial and formal speech makes the London setting, and its aristocracy, vibrant. Detailed descriptions of sophisticated parties and opulent houses in the beautiful English countryside also result in an atmospheric tale.

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ANNA MARIA COLIVICCHI (September 17, 2021)

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