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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ ROMANCE

Labyrinth of Passions

Angelica Rose
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A love story is often propelled by the thrill of sexual conquest. *Labyrinth of Passions* is no exception.

This stereotypical novel of physical desire takes countless turns—all predictable. Yet author Angelica Rose's explicit realism elevates *Labyrinth of Passions* to a semi-mainstream platform.

The world of royal niceties in 1858 London is far removed from the 21st century, but Rose brings out the basic, or shall we say *baser*, elements of character in an arousing tale that avid readers of sensual romance will appreciate.

Her novel showcases the best and worst of contrived, prearranged sex behind closed doors. In the days when a woman's choices were limited, selecting a husband from two suitors may have been the most freedom she would be granted in life. However, Spanish Lady Isabel De Carballo is fortunate. After 10 years in a convent, this purpose-driven heroine actually *likes* the man destined to be her mate, Viscount Lucas Merewether. She is determined to capture his soul as well as his body.

Alternating between crude, graphic descriptions and frank, emotional appraisals, Rose mixes the liberalism of erotica with the conservatism of romance. The result is an unusual juxtaposition of contemporary no-frills sex and Old World tradition. In the following passage, Isabel contemplates the process of losing her virginity:

> *She had tried to concentrate on the painful part of the actual deflowering, but her mind persistently drifted back to the feeling of him inside of her after the initial pain had disappeared. Yes, the sensation had been … glorious toward the end. If she had not put a stop to it, she could swear she would have found one of those orgasms that Shirley had described to her.*

Since Lucas has a mistress early in the story and does not wish to bond with a wife, he cannot fulfill Isabel on a spiritual level; her only role is to produce his heir. As time passes, though, this dark Gothic hero develops greater self-awareness, foreshadowing the need for inner change:

> *He remembered her cuddling close to him and promising him that she was going to make him the best wife in the world. He recalled that one singular time she professed her love for him, only to have him request, no, forbid her from saying it again. It had been his own chilling reaction to that incredibly wonderful declaration that had urged him to react almost cruelly.*

Interlaced with classic appeal, *Labyrinth of Passions* weaves a coarse thread into strange material, yet the fabric holds an eccentric charm. Transcending and assimilating genres is the trend in film and fiction, and many authors like Rose have capitalized on the opportunity. Expect more from this newcomer.
JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 28, 2011)

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