



The Gentleman's Daughter

Bianca M. Schwarz

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Sir Henry March, agent to the crown, returns in *The Gentleman's Daughter*, Bianca M. Schwarz's gritty romance sequel set in the 1820s, when Henry encounters unexpected love.

Henry is determined to find a respectable bride to ensure that his illegitimate daughter, Emily, will enter high society without trouble. Meanwhile, an enemy plots revenge for earlier events, all related to Henry's investigation into an ancient men's society that was known for its sadistic practices, and which now roils over a changing of the guard.

When Henry follows a lead to Brighton, he meets Isabella, a captivating painter whose traumas prevent her from growing closer to him. These twin, charged plots converge when Isabella is kidnapped by a member of the society, culminating in a rescue in which the men defend their loved ones, and Isabella confronts her fear and finds redemption.

With elements of a mannered Regency romance, erotica, and suspense, the mercurial plot alternates between Henry and Isabella's lively meetings at social events, and as she paints en plein air; inquiries about the society; and brushes with peril, often surrounding the harm that befalls women. The survival of rape is a potent, dark theme that is complicated by characters who participate in the society's sexual brutality. Heightened allusions to background treacheries among the elite also tease at future entanglements.

Though Henry's spy work is subtle amid his domestic concerns, his character is an intriguing blend of a dashing rogue and a protective gentleman. Isabella's art is also appealing proof of her single-minded determination, despite the limitations for women of her time.

The Gentleman's Daughter is an escapist romance novel whose pleasures and terrors culminate in a hopeful, restorative ending.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2021)

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