

The Innkeeper's Daughter

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The Innkeeper's Daughter is a Cinderella-tinted Regency romance that brings orphaned Eliza Broad into the life of a gentleman spy, Sir Henry March. As the two hunt down a high-bred serial rapist, they form a tender bond that is tested by the social mores of the British upper class.

Although Eliza is demoralized, debauched, and bedraggled when she escapes her wicked stepfather, Henry is fast to see her potential. They come from different worlds and have disparate interests—Eliza wants her mother's inn back, and Henry seeks a traitor who sold the Crown's military secrets—but the two find that their purposes are intertwined. Soon, Eliza is elevated to Henry's lavish world of ballrooms and gowns, and Henry sneaks into the underworld that Eliza escaped, complete with sex traffickers, sadists, and victimized virgins.

Eliza's awakening to her sexuality and the nobility's opulent lifestyle is tender and authentic; she recognizes beauty around her, first seen "in the glow-worms under the oak tree and in a summer meadow," now found in "the human body itself ... an instrument to express joy, sorrow, and harmony." She is enamored with Henry's charm and with the luxury that he offers, including intricate clothes, meals, and furnishings, which are bookends to the couple's explicit sexual explorations.

Eliza's status as an outsider is concealed as she helps Henry track down the traitor, and if this novel lacks anything, it is a nuanced exploration of her inequity. While she is Henry's equal in courage, her youth, poverty, inexperience, and powerlessness put her at a disadvantage. However, Eliza refuses to be a plaything, and her frequent self-assertions make her a modern, plucky, and appealing heroine.

The Innkeeper's Daughter is a sumptuous, sensual Regency romance that teases the senses and recalls the golden age of romance novels.

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