



A Garden Folly

Candice Fern

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Two sisters on the edge of poverty have a chance to meet wealthy, titled, unmarried gentlemen when they are unexpectedly invited to a house party at a famous country estate owned by the Duke of Carlisle. Though courted by a wealthy earl, Catherine Forsythe finds herself falling for the handsome estate gardener and faced with the choice of marrying for money and security, or following her heart.

A Garden Folly Details

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From Reader Review A Garden Folly for online ebook

Ivy H says

This was a novel that's a bit reminiscent of the traditional regencies. The strength of the storyline rests in the character development and character interaction as well as the setting, dialogue and the author's fine storytelling skills. It's not filled with hot sex but the chemistry between the MC's is palpable throughout. In this novel, it's the little things (that we often don't find in romance novels) that help to build the romance between the MC's. It's a whimsical, old fashioned tale of a H who adopts the disguise of a gardener to court the woman with whom he's falling in love. The H is Stephen, the Duke of Carlisle and he's not a rake or a manwhore. Stephen prefers to stay away from the societal demands of the Ton and spend his time working on the management of his many estates. His mother, the dowager duchess, decides to give a month long house party at his favourite country estate Chissingworth and he's unable to leave and go to another of his many estates because he's in the process of supervising the construction of a special conservatory in his garden. At the same time, he is peeved because he disdains having to participate in the house party because all the single women will be running after him and flirting. That's when he decides that he will just stay at Chissingworth but not communicate with the guests; he'll live in another part of the mansion and spend his days hiding out in gardens:

The heroine Catherine, is lucky to get an invitation to the house party because her widowed aunt Hetty is an old friend of the dowager duchess. Catherine, her sister Susannah and her aunt Hetty are close to starving because all their money has almost run out. The heroine, is the only practical member of little family and she thinks that the only solution to all their problems is if she and her sister are able to get rich husbands. This is set in the regency era so women of the heroine's class have little option (except to take jobs as governesses, mistresses or companions) but to look to marriage as a solution to abject poverty. Catherine's not a gold digger type of young woman, though. She's just very practical and has a keen need to survive and she has to take care of her sister and her aunt as well since they're not as capable as the heroine. In fact, her sister Susannah is a stupidly delightful character; in other words, Susannah's an airhead with a heart of gold. Lol. Susannah's the older sister but she looks to the heroine for assistance with everything.

The MC's meet in the splendid gardens at Chissingworth and the H is immediately taken with Catherine because she's everything he ever wanted in his perfect woman:

Stephen's breath was almost knocked out of him as he listened to this extraordinary speech. Here was a very pretty young girl, with dark blond curls spilling out of her bonnet and huge gray eyes peering at him guilelessly, who knew about rare flowers and special hybrids—his favorite subjects—and wasn't fawning all over him.

And she actually had no idea who he was.

It was delicious. It was too perfect. He could not keep from smiling.

Candice Hern. Garden Folly (Kindle Locations 1027-1034).

Catherine thinks he's just the ordinary head gardener called Stephen Archibald and so she is comfortable around him. She confides in him and tells him everything ! She tells him about her poverty and about how her butler McDougal had managed to used his *connections* to "borrow" gowns, jewellery and even the

carriage that conveyed them to Chissingworth. That was one humorous aspect of the story because McDougal came across as a kind of fairy Godfather since his ability to "borrow" stuff for the heroine and her sister turned these 2 ladies into Cinderellas who were outfitted for the house party. This novel reminded me of a modern Jane Austen story because of the way the plot unfolded. Catherine is falling in love with an impoverished gardener (or so she thinks) but she is determined to be practical and wed only a rich man. I felt sorry for Catherine, especially when the wealthy eligible Miles, the Earl of Strickland, started to court her. Miles is a widower with 2 little daughters and he thinks that Catherine will make the perfect wife for him and the ideal stepmother for his girls. Miles ends up getting a novel of his own called *The Best Intentions*.

The big conflict in this novel is that which occurs within Catherine's heart. She loves Stephen but she's afraid to consign herself to a future filled with poverty. There's a scene where she actually tells Stephen all about her plans to get herself a rich husband and she doesn't realize (until it's too late, that he's angry and disappointed to hear these revelations)

"Just before the duchess's invitation arrived," she continued, "I was this close to looking for a position as a teacher or governess. But what on earth could Susannah do? She is too pretty and too scatterbrained to be a governess. She is an excellent seamstress, of course, and probably could have found employment with a dressmaker. But that is a difficult life at best. Susannah is much too delicate for that sort of hardship. I cannot even bear to think of it. So," she added in a lighter tone, "here we are at Chissingworth looking for rich husbands."

Stephen was stunned into silence. He would never in a million years have pegged his guileless Miss Forsythe as a fortune hunter. It went against everything he believed about her. He stared at her in painful disbelief. His silence must have alarmed her, for she turned and looked over her shoulder at him.

Candice Hern. *Garden Folly* (Kindle Locations 1939-1946).

I felt sorry for both MC's because I understood what each wanted out of life. Stephen wanted someone to love him for himself rather than for his money and title while Catherine was just tired of all the suffering and horrific poverty she'd had to deal with after her father died. I totally understood why Catherine felt she needed a rich husband, especially after her sister Susannah fell in love with Captain Phillips at the house party. This guy was the H's cousin and although he was employed as the steward at Chissingworth, he didn't have the financial resources to help take care of Susannah's sister and elderly aunt. The closer the Earl of Strickland comes to proposing, the more depressed and worried Catherine becomes. The H is aware of the agony that she's feeling and he accelerates his own courtship of her. The heroine is emotionally tortured at this point because she's desperately in love with Stephen and so she lashes out at him:

"How many times do I have to ask you to leave me alone?" she said in a voice that was almost a wail. She launched herself off the bench and stood to face him from a few feet away. Her hands were balled into fists at her sides.

"It is all your fault!" she said., "You are ruining everything!"

"What are you talking about?"

"There is an earl—an earl!—who may want to marry me. And yet you keep pushing yourself on me, ruining everything."

Candice Hern. Garden Folly (Kindle Locations 3871-3877).

This part of the novel was intensely dramatic and Catherine ended up making the right choice when the Earl proposed. She broke down in a fit of ugly crying and told the Earl that she didn't love him:

"N-n-n-no," she sputtered. "It is j-just. . ." She gave a great choking sob before going on. "You are m-much too n-nice a m-man to be s-s-saddled with m-me."

Lord Strickland gently lifted her chin so that she would look at him. Only she could not bear to look at him.

"Saddled?" he said in a soft, kind voice. His eyes were so full of concern that she began to feel even more wretched. "You know I would not think any such thing. I would not have asked if I had thought marriage with you would be so disagreeable. Come now, Catherine. Tell me the truth. What is it, really, that has upset you so?"

"I c-cannot m-m-marry you, my l-lord." Her voice was choked with tears and she took a deep breath to try to compose herself. She was making such a mess of things.

"Tell me why," he said.

"B-because it would not be f-fair," she blurted. "I do not love you—"

"Oh but, Catherine—"

"—and I only wanted you for your f-fortune even though I I-loved someone else b-but he is not r-rich,"

Candice Hern. Garden Folly (Kindle Locations 4255-4271).

This was almost as if Catherine had undergone a sort of mini emotional catharsis and it led to the most beautiful denouement ever ! Catherine finally decided that it would be better to take her chances with a man she loved even though he was just an ordinary, poor gardener. She made me feel so ashamed of myself because I would've totally accepted the handsome, kind and rich Earl because I'm lazy and shallow and ... *sob* *sob* and I would've ended up crying well deserved mercenary tears of blood after I realized I'd given up true love with **an even richer guy who was a duke**. And now all you readers will be shaking your heads and laughing at me...*sob* *sob* but I know I'm not strong enough to say yes to an impoverished gardener. I'm a terrible person ! Lol.

I loved the reconciliation scene between the MC's. It was like something out of a hollywood golden age romance movie:

"I am so s-sorry," she stammered, burrowing her head against his shoulder. She had wept buckets of tears this night and could not seem to stop. "I did not really mean any of those horrible things I said to you before. I was so hateful to you."

"Hush, love. It doesn't matter."

"But you do not understand. I know you must have thought I was heartless and greedy. But I was so scared. I thought it was my last chance. I didn't want to lose everything like my father did."

"Hush, love."

Candice Hern. Garden Folly (Kindle Locations 4444-4452).

My selfish, mercenary heart almost cried at the pure goodness and wonder of this scene and my dog Harold probably thought I was going mad again. The dialogue that continued was the stuff of great romance:

"Shh. It doesn't matter."

"But I didn't mean it, Stephen! I didn't mean it. You are not an ignorant gardener. How could I ever have said such a thing? You are the most wonderful man in the whole world. And you are not at all ignorant. You know so many things about plants and history and you've been to America and you've taught me so much and you are such fun to be with and you make me laugh and you find me flowers to paint and you look so handsome that you make me weak in the knees and you make me feel tingly all over when you kiss me. Oh, how I wish I had never said those horrid things to you! Can you ever forgive me?"

"It doesn't matter, love. None of that matters anymore." He lifted her chin and kissed her so tenderly she thought her heart would break from the sweetness of it. He pulled back and looked into her eyes.

"I love you, Catherine," he said, and then pulled her close against him once more.

Candice Hern. Garden Folly (Kindle Locations 4457-4467).

And, the final scene where the dowager duchess announced the MC's engagement was even more dramatic !
(view spoiler)

This was a **feel good** type of traditional regency that's very well written with engaging characters and I didn't even get bored for one second. There's no cheating and no OW drama. The heroine is courted by another man but it's purely platonic interaction.

This is the H, Stephen:

This is the heroine, Catherine:

Blacky *Romance Addict* says

This was a very sweet read about a duke pretending to be a gardener and trying to win the heart of one woman by making her love only him, not his title

The Duke of Carlisle is rumored to be ...touched in the head But he is in fact a botanist, often spending his time in his garden and avoiding society as much as he can. Stephen can afford to be excentric of course, being the only eligible duke in the kingdom. His mother organises a country party, but he refuses to attend, forcing her to tell everyone he's not in residence.

Catherine Forsythe is very poor, she and her sister are living with their aunt and barely surviving. So when

the invitation for the Carlisle party arrives, it's in the right time, now both sisters can try and find themselves rich husbands :)

It all doesn't go according to plan as you might suppose, Catherine stumbles upon a man in the gardens and thinks he's the head gardener It's, of course, Stephen. They form a friendship through a mutual love for flowers, they meet in the gardens every day and slowly fall in love It's all well until she tells him she's here to catch a rich husband, she doesn't want to be poor anymore. Stephen (being duke almost all his life and hating the fact everyone wants him only for his money) regards her with contempt as if that wasn't what every single woman in the Marriage Mart had in mind. Gah he really frustrated me there and that's the only reason this is going to be a 4 star read. But still, they work it out in the end (which was hilarious, bad, bad Stephen, I'd kill him if he put me through something like that)

Anyway, having read all CH's books I have to say I adore her, she really does romance well, I love her style of writing, it seems so authentic and although she doesn't write extreme hot sex scenes, I don't really mind at all :) The story is great and that's what captures me :)

Lyuda says

3.5 Nice, uncomplicated mistaken identity story. Little bit too sweet for me and I did not particularly like the hero's way of creating HEA.

kris says

Catherine Forsythe, along with her sister and Aunt, are invited to spend a month at the Dowager Duchess of Carlisle's house party. Meanwhile her son, the Duke aka Stephen Archibald [...] Manwaring is "not in residence" which is code for UNDERCOVER. As a gardener. So he can built a fancy greenhouse I MEAN MODERN GLASS CONSERVATORY PARDON MY FRENCH. Stephen runs into the beguiling Catherine and finds himself ENTRANCED until she makes plain the fact that she needs to marry for money. Then his warm feelings get hotter in a hate-y sort of way, before skipping right over to lust. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT, WHERE ARE YOU??

1. This had a few moments of entertainment before the very real *DANGER WILL ROBINSON* vibes choked out the rest of the story...
2. Entertaining: Undercover dukes! Love in disguise! The question of heart vs. logic! All the maternal figures being in on it! The sister blindly falling for the "wrong man" who turns out to be the exact right man for her! MacDougal as the fairy godmother the girls didn't know they needed!
3. The bad vibes: The fact that Stephen's feelings so clearly fall into the "She's not like other girls!" → "I like her!" → "She *is* like other girls!" → "I *DESPISE* HER" → "But I want to kiss her face off." → "So I'm going to kiss her face off and convince her she wants me." → "Oh, yeah, I guess this feeling in my chest (in addition to the despising and lust) is love?" → "Still going to force unwanted physical attentions on her in order to convince her she's into me!!!"

I mean this game of emotional ping pong is literally so gross. His emotional rollercoaster should have been closed: it is a danger to passengers. Stephen is just gross. The whole thing is so gross.

4. Meanwhile, Catherine. I empathized with her a little—OK, a *lot*—more than I did with the Douche of Carlisle, but she really wasn't that much better. Her problem is a little more straightforward: because her sister is in love with a poor house steward, Catherine needs to marry \$\$\$\$. So there are no burgeoning feelings for the gardener: she likes chatting to him. She likes seeing him. Then he's kissing her and confusing her. Then she's in love with him.

So the emotional aspect? NOT GREAT. But her reasoning for refusing her acknowledge the potential for a relationship with the gardener? MAKES SOME SENSE.

5. I was frustrated with the fact that Stephen didn't put together the pieces of Catherine's poverty. She literally tells him that she is wearing semi-stolen clothes. And he's like "CAN'T BE THAT BAD". It isn't until his mother shares the whole sordid story of her father's ruination that he's like "OH I GUESS SHE DOESN'T HAVE ANY MONEY???" and even then he doesn't engage with it in a fulfilling way. He doesn't feel remorse for his shitty assumptions; he doesn't understand her overwhelming fear of starvation; he doesn't engage with the reality of a woman in his shitty society falling on hard times. He's got money and can make the decision to wait for ~love, so she should too!!!

6. Stephen's predatory behavior is totally portrayed as A-OK, which it is most definitely NOT. There are several references made to 'stalking' Catherine through the woods or in other forest-y areas so that he can get her alone and assault her. He 'likes' following her this way.

WHAT THE EVER-LIVING NIGHTMARE IS THIS. This is SO EMPHATICALLY SCREWED UP. DON'T ROMANTICIZE IT; DON'T ENCOURAGE IT.

Emmalg says

Enjoyable romance

I've followed Candice Hern's Facebook page for some time and was always curious Scott get books as I felt she probably had a style that described clothing and scenery in more detail than most contemporary regency romance authors. I would say that Hern's style is not at all jarring, like some others, there is nothing that makes me feel the story was lacking in research. It was easy to get lost in.

I liked the characters, the plot is an old one though well executed.

I really liked the fact it was a true romance, there was no need for sex in the story. It is almost as good as a Heyer - I can't quite go beyond that because there's a certain warmth in Heyer's writing I've yet to find anywhere else.

All together a great read - I'm buying the next book right now!

Anne says

4 stars for enjoyment

3 stars for quality

This Regency romance was very sweet and lovely, and I had a really good time reading it. Our heroine, Miss

Catherine Forsythe, is a penniless young woman as stubborn as a mule and determined, I repeat, *determined* to get out of poverty somehow. And here we're talking about real, actual poverty, as in bread-and-water for dinner and barely any clothes and furniture as possessions. Fortunately though, Aunt Hetty (with whom Catherine lives with her sister Susannah) has a good friend, who decides to invite all three to her annual summer party at her estate. Ladies and gentlemen, **welcome** to Chissingworth!

Aunt Hetty's friend is none other than the Duchess of Carlisle. If I would have been Catherine, I would have died of a heart attack right there!!

But our dear Miss Forsythe, although highly impressed and awed by the place and its inhabitants, is thrilled as the prospect of spending a month there, because she sees the invitation as the PERFECT opportunity to find a RICH husband.

Beware, the most determined and professional fortune-hunter has arrived!

Catherine's obsession with marrying a fortune is understandable, given her conditions and the circumstances when rendered her and her family to such a state of poverty. I sympathized whole-heartedly with her. She isn't so silly, however, to arrive at Chissingworth hoping to ensnare the Duke himself, or anyone above her who wouldn't be willing to take her as a wife. She just wants someone rich.

Stephen Manwaring, the Duke of Carlisle, son of the present Duchess, is rumoured to be eccentric and half-witted, avoiding society as much as he can, and spending all his time in his gardens and in his apparently very small office unworthy of a duke, at the back of the house, which probably looks like something like this anyways.

The Duke is in fact simply tired of everyone liking him for the sake of his fortunes, and ardently wishes he could find someone to love him for himself. Very understandable as well, and he also had all my sympathy. He decides to avoid the party and hides in his gardens...but Catherine is also very fond of flowers, and the two collide (literally) and sparks instantly fly, even though Catherine believes the duke is no more than a simple gardener...(this isn't a spoiler as the reader knows within the first few pages)

Let the fun begin!!!!

Stephen and Catherine had good chemistry, but I wish he could have tried harder to persuade her more with words, instead of his tongue. I don't mind a passionate kiss or two, but in this book there were many, and they were a bit more on the steamy side than what I usually go for. I think I would have accepted them better had there been more *talk* between them. Instead of talking her to reason, he would grab her by the shoulders and kiss her until she melted in his arms, but (view spoiler). And then, at some point when she is trying to explain something to him, he keeps saying "**Hush, it doesn't matter. It will be all right.**" Hush, it doesn't matter????!?!?!? Wadaya mean IT DOESNT MATTER?!? Let her explain herself, for God's sake! That habit of him of not talking/listening about important subjects was very infuriating! And he moreover had a weird obsession with Catherine's eyebrows...he kept noticing them and thinking "those fabulous

eyebrows" (I sincerely hope this was a preference only to *him* and that guys don't actually pay that much attention to eyebrows, because mine are basically never done!).

But then, I remembered that he was a handsome, muscular man with brown hair and green eyes, and that no one had ever really loved him for who he was, and that by spending so much time apart from society he kept to himself a lot, so all was forgotten :)

A Garden Folly was a cute book, but it was pure fluff and is meant to be read for enjoyment's sake only, because there really isn't much literary merit or substance to it and I found the writing style too modern and very repetitive. Good God, it's her! Good Lord, I love him! Damn, what is she doing. Good Lord, I can't marry him. Damnation, why she so stubborn! I don't mind those expressions when they're used moderately, but in this case they were overused. There wasn't enough Regency slang for the period - a few expressions here and there, but the dialogue could well have been between people of our century. The sentences of the narration were also very short, which only further accentuated the modern feel of the book. "***She did not know. Not for certain. But was glad to hear it.***" How about you join those three fragments and make me a pretty sentence?? Sometimes writing short sentences/fragments is a good method to enhance certain emotions, for example with: "***She had seemed so perfect. Until today.***" we get a sort of "dramatic" feel and we sense the character's disappointment. But used throughout the entire novel, it became annoying. And redundant. And difficult to look over. And it lessened my overall enjoyment. And...yeah see? :) Moreover, I don't know if it's just my edition, but there were a **lot** of typos, and my fingers were just itching to grab a pen and start making corrections. I *hate* when that happens!

Having said that, however, there were aspects of the writing that I really appreciated. Ms. Hern's style is very straightforward-no-ambiguity, and she succeeded in making me feel for and with the characters. Whether someone was sad or happy, I felt the same way, and when the H/h got mad at each other, I could understand and sympathize with both points of view. And most importantly, **every single time** it was written that someone laughed, I would actually find myself chuckling aloud. When Aunt Hetty starts laughing uncontrollably, near the end, I was laughing as hard as she was! The imagery was so well evoked, too! I could see the mansion, and the gardens, and the beautiful violets (and having Google images helps a lot!). I loved the beauty that emanated from *A Garden Folly*.

Another good point about this book, was that there were NO annoying characters!!! They were all loveable. The only ones who angered me on a few instances were the H/h, but overall I loved them, so I can forgive those instances. But all the other ones were fabulous! The Duchess was the nicest lady, Aunt Hetty a wonderful aunt (and the two together were priceless), Susannah was such a darling and Lord Strickland was sheer perfection. I loved him as much as the hero, and cannot wait to read his story in *The Best Intentions!*

Victoria says

Catherine Forsythe and her sister need to marry a fortune, or at the end at least one of them must. The girls are living in near poverty thanks to their late father's mismanagement. They are invited to a country house party by the Dowager Duchess of Carlisle, who knew their aunt as a girl. With a plan set in place the ladies set off to find their husbands.

You know what they say about best laid plans....

The Duke, Stephen, hates his mother's parties and assumes people only care about him for his title. When he bumps into Catherine in the gardens that he is so passionate about he pretends he is the gardener to avoid detection. He allows this ruse to continue as Catherine and he get to know one another and feelings develop, despite Catherine's frank admission that she's trying to marry a fortune. Stephen, and others at the party, do their best to make her see that a fortune doesn't guarantee happiness.

I loved this story, even with Stephen not respecting her wishes of space. I've loved all of Hern's heroine's so far, I find them all very endearing. As usual I read this story very quickly, it was so hard to put it down!

Charlene says

I'm really enjoying this regency romance challenge! I have never read Ms. Hern's novels till this challenge and her book are wonderful. There light, romantic and with the right amount of angst.

This story is about 2 sisters(Catherine & Susannah) of a gentleman baron who are left destitute on his death. They're living with an Aunt who is barely getting by and with no income for the three, life looks bleak. Then a turn of fate, Aunt Hattie runs into an old friend who invite her and her nieces to her summer home for a month(A Garden Party). This friend is a Duchess with a recluse son who everyone thinks is odd. He certainly would not be at the summer garden party. But lots of eligible men and ladies will be there and Catherine is not going to pass up an opportunity for her older beautiful sister not to find an eligible wealthy unmarried man to marry. With a plan in place they head for the Duchess' summer home Chissingworth. But thing start to go very wrong.

I loved Catherine, she was bright, intelligent and very naïve. And the electrifying repartee between her and the hero was wonderful. Just loved this story. It was fun, light easy read. I read this book in a day and I'm not sure if I can wait to read the 2nd book in this series. Don't know if I can wait till next month!!

I would recommend this book to the romantic!!

Serena Ivo says

3.5 stars. This book is the tamer of Hern's dare-to-be-tame romances and benefits from character dynamics that feel more natural than her other novels. Overall, the book moves along pleasingly and satisfies a sweet tooth without castrating the hero to accomplish the effect. The reader expects at any moment the heroine's complete undoing in a public scene. That expectation is met but in a slightly different way; the eventual reveal Miss Forsythe duly deserves.

Melody says

This was the story about a fabulously wealthy duke who was miserable because he couldn't tell if people liked him for who he was, or for his title and money and his relationship with a poor noblewoman whose parents had died, leaving her and her sister virtually penniless and one step out of the poor house years ago. She watched her sister, her aunt, and herself go through horrible circumstances without complaint, and when

the chance came for her to marry into money, she decided she would take it so that her children would never know the suffering that she had.

Apparently this made her a Terrible Person.

The other reviewers talk about how it was so sweet that he wanted to be loved for who he was! That he wanted her to pick him even though she thought he was poor as a church mouse, living in a house that did not belong to him, and only on the sufferance of a crazy mad duke. That he lied to her for the entire book, yelled at her for wanting to provide for her family, and then emotionally manipulated her, refused to try to see things from her perspective, and then when she capitulated and told him in tears that everyone was telling her that her life choices were disgraceful and that maybe all you really did need was love, he decided to make tell her in front of everyone that he was the Duke and wasn't she pleased. She fainted, told him she loved him and that was it.

Nothing about how he lied to her for the entirety of their relationship. Nothing about how he should have respected her experiences and given her the benefit of the doubt. Nothing about how his emotional manipulations hurt her. Nothing.

Love Is The Only Thing That Matters And She Was Wrong. The End.

^^Moral of the story. Because wanting your children to never starve is a horrible, horrible ambition and she should be ashamed of herself. *sarcasm*

Christy English says

I love this book! Candice Hern has done a wonderful job of making the world of Regency England come to life. This novel is charming, romantic, and sweet. I adore it. For all those who love Georgette Heyer, this book is for you.

Ginny says

The beginning of this story was really enjoyable. I liked the interactions between the H/h. Then it all went downhill when she revealed her motives. (In other words, she was honest and practical while he remained a spoiled liar.) The "hero" became judgmental, unsympathetic and a stalker. That's the opposite of romantic. I really didn't like how the last 2/3 of this book played out.

The next book with Miles as the hero is SO much better. I recommend reading that one instead.

Jennie says

Review originally posted at Tea, Toast & Books.

In Brief: Catherine Forsythe and her sister Susannah have been reduced to poverty, so when an invitation to a house party arrives, Catherine knows they must make the most of the opportunity to find wealthy husbands. A certain head gardener at the ducal estate has some different ideas, though....

I Thought: I wasn't as immediately drawn into the story as I was with *The Best Intentions*. (It really might be unfair to read the two out of order, and so close together, because *The Best Intentions* is really one of those rare gems, so I find myself making comparisons.) To me, Catherine seemed a little grasping and hard-hearted, so determined to marry for wealth — at least at first. If more of the sisters' life had been outlined, I might have had more sympathy; as it was, I had the same impression of her, at the beginning, as our hero does of most women of society.

However, that shortly went away, because Catherine displayed a completely formed personality, with hobbies, interests, and a sense of humor, shortly after arriving at the house party. Her fortune hunting, though, becomes sort of the main bone of contention between her and Stephen, and that aspect of her personality continued to grate on me just a tiny bit. Only a little bit; but that's why I had to go with 4.5 stars rather than 5. Well, that and Catherine's perception of her sister as being bubble-headed. It's not that it's unrealistic for her to think that way; it just struck me as harsh and perhaps slightly manipulative. Perhaps on a reread I might not think so.

Stephen, our duke, is quite charming. He's definitely the outdoor type, and he mostly manages to keep his good sense about him through the twists and turns of the plot. He has a tiny bit of angst in his background, but it just serves to make him more real and doesn't bog down the lighthearted story.

MacDougal, a sort of... expanded butler, provides a good deal of comic relief at the outset as he somehow obtains for Catherine and Susannah everything they might need to present well at a house party. There's a little foreshadowing here, too, that leads to hilarity later in the book. Aunt Hetty has a good head on her shoulders, as does the dowager duchess. And Miles! I was so pleased that he was quite wonderful in this book as well.

As I have come to expect from Ms. Hern, we again have detailed descriptions of clothing and of the estate, which really serves to establish a sense of time and place without making me feel like I've been clubbed over the head with Extraneous Research Facts.

Watching Stephen and Catherine fall in love was such a joy. And it was based on intelligent conversation (at least in part) that actually seemed intelligent! I don't think I can say much more about the main plot without spoiling the story, but the writing is quick, light and witty. For example, possibly my favorite quote:

As if he hadn't gone round the bend already, to be skulking in his own shrubbery.
Another keeper from Ms. Hern. I'm so glad I discovered her books, and I'm afraid of what will happen when I run out of them! That they are all available at such a low price for Kindle is wonderful, though I'd like to own printed editions of these someday. I like them that much.

Addendum: My coworker and I were discussing this book on the ride home, having both just finished it. 'Tis a happy thing to giggle over a great book with someone else.

Ali says

[threatens Mr. Archibald with termination because he seduced her (hide spoiler)]

Laurel says

In landscape design, a garden folly is a structure whose only objective is to deceive. They have no purpose other than as ornament—to delight the eye and draw one to their door to evoke a romantic scene or time. How apt that author Candice Hern chose to name her Regency romance *A Garden Folly*, since her main characters are follies themselves.

Set at the Kent grand country estate of the Duke of Carlisle, two impoverished sisters impersonate aristocrats to entrap rich husbands, while the wealthy and titled owner of the dukedom, and the continuing custodian and creator of its grand landscape, hides behind the mantle of head gardener to avert interaction with Society. Both hero and heroine have serious trust issues. How they will overcome their personal challenges is a serpentine path that teasingly twists, turns, and surprises the reader until the last page.

Catherine and Susannah Forsythe are down on their luck. Living in genteel poverty in the wrong side of London with Aunt Hetty was not what they had expected at this time in their lives. Their father, Sir Benjamin Forsythe, squandered their family fortune before he died two years ago, but they still have beauty and wits in their corner. A surprise invitation from Aunt Hetty's childhood friend, the Duchess of Carlisle, for her annual summer house party at Chissingworth may be their only chance to catch rich husbands. Determined to pull off the deception that they are wealthy young ladies, Catherine, with the help of their servant McDougal, magically acquire all the tools needed to disguise their poverty: clothes, carriage, jewels and servants. Now they must set their caps for the right man, steering clear of the wrong sorts: "penniless younger sons, clerics, or half-pay officers." Arriving in style, the deception begins.

Stephen Archibald Frederick Charles Godfrey Manwaring, Duke of Carlisle, is a serious gardener and devout bachelor. At two and thirty he has managed to avoid marriage and his mother's annual summer garden party, devised to introduce him to marriageable young ladies, for years. Since the enigmatic duke has succeeded eluding polite Society most of his life, he has been tagged an eccentric half-wit. He has, however, devoted his life to the management of his estate's landscapes, collecting rare plants and avoiding love. Catherine, also a great admirer of rare plants is thrilled at the chance to be in the country again and happily strolls the gardens to drink in the verdant countryside and profuse flora of the magnificently landscaped Chissingworth gardens. When the young duke and young the masquerading fortune hunter collide in the garden, he is roughly dressed and she mistakes him for the head gardener. She is a passionate admirer of rare flowers, especially hybrids, which are his favorites too—so he lets the deception continue. They agree to meet again the next morning, and thus begins his infatuation with a new rare flower named Catherine. She, on the other hand, is deep into discovering the "right" husband for her beautiful but dim sister Sukey and herself, and with the help of McDougal, who runs recon to determine who among the 60 guests are listed on the top 50 bachelors under 40 in Britain, is totally oblivious to who she is actually meeting every morning to tour the gardens. Also among the guests is Stephen's friend Miles, the Earl of Strickland, a recent widow who takes a shine to Catherine. There are many other eligible bachelors to pursue until nearsighted Susannah goes after the wrong green-coated man and all of the weight of finding a rich husband falls on Catherine. As she and the head gardener become more than friends, and an earl is courting her, Catherine must decide if she should marry for love or money.

The British are indisputably passionate gardeners. Setting *A Garden Folly* at a country estate at the height of August, the peak blooming season, allowed the author to take us on a fabulous journey through the gardens as they would have appeared in Regency times:

"With this in mind, she wandered through the surprisingly informal arrangement of gardens. In the dressed grounds nearest the house, high, clipped shrubbery hedges of sweetbrier, box, and hawthorn surrounded each garden. Moving through the enclosed hedges was akin to walking through the various rooms of a house, each room different from the last. One was awash in bright colors of summer, the gravel paths bordered with stocks, pinks, double rocket, sweet Williams and asters. The morning sun fell upon spires of delphinium sparkling with dew. Her artist's eye was drawn to the glitter of the moisture on the indigo and royal peaks, and she paused to seat herself on a nearby stone bench. She pulled a pencil and a scrap of

paper from her pocket and roughly sketched the familiar blossoms.” p. 36

Hern is renowned for her Regency research and descriptions in her novels. Usually we are treated to vintage clothing fabrics and home interiors, but in this case we are delightfully entertained with flora and folly. The landscape as an artist’s canvas can be formed and molded and admired. So can people, and I was not only struck by our journey through the gardens of a vast country estate, but through the transformation of the characters.

Catherine was determined that she and her sister marry for money to save and protect their family. During Regency times that was not uncommon, but her mercenary motives eventually catch up with her as she reveals her true motives to the head gardener/Stephen as a fortune hunter of the worst sort. As her “vener of perfection” to Stephen crumbles, he sees her fierce determination to bag a fortune—a large fortune—and is disgusted. Her heartless calculation repulses him and reinforces his trust issues. He is certain that no one can love him and not his title. He will not reveal that he is duke until he has secured her affection as a commoner; she will not let herself love a man who cannot provide for her in a grand style. Two people who have been forced by circumstances to be “follies,” destined for heartbreak.

I can’t honestly say that I admired Catherine and Stephen’s motives, nor their personalities, but by the end things do evolve and their facades change. How we are taken down the garden path is a delightful excursion. This garden geek was not only entranced by the picturesque views and swooning fragrance of an English garden, but by the transformation of the characters by love. *A Garden Folly* was the perfect antidote to a dark winter of rain and snow. A refreshing journey of discovery and delight.

Laurel Ann, Austenprose
