



Shadowheart

Laura Kinsale

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Shadowheart

Laura Kinsale

Shadowheart Laura Kinsale

Swept up in political intrigue, an assassin and a princess embrace a passionate love in this fourteenth-century romance by a *New York Times*–bestselling author.

As the last unmarried princess of Monteverde, Elayne is trapped in a marital bond when her hand is promised to the land's ruler. On the voyage to meet her future husband, she is captured by Allegreto Navona—the living embodiment of the dark angel she's seen in dreams. Endowed with godlike beauty, his eyes burn bright with sin. A woman of modesty would flee such a man. But try as she might, a wanton hunger binds her to his side . . .

Trained as an assassin, Allegreto is the bastard son of an ambitious lord who raised him to murder for control of Monteverde. Now that his father is dead, if Allegreto can make Elayne his wife, it will cleanse his tainted blood, and the country will be his, but she is no mere maiden to be possessed. Unexpectedly, he falls in love with her, finding in her quick mind and azure eyes the conqueror of his heart. But will his dark past scare her off?

With a legendary ability to create lovers you'll never forget, the author of *Flowers from the Storm* offers a lively historical romance.

Shadowheart Details

Date : Published April 1st 2014 by Open Road Media Romance (first published 2004)

ISBN :

Author : Laura Kinsale

Format : Kindle Edition 516 pages

Genre : Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Medieval, Historical Fiction

 [Download Shadowheart ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Shadowheart ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Shadowheart Laura Kinsale

From Reader Review Shadowheart for online ebook

Cristina says

En la Inglaterra del s. XIV, Lady Elena se queda absolutamente asombrada al descubrir que es la princesa —desaparecida hace tiempo— del poderoso principado italiano de Monteverde y la única heredera viva. Ahora, a pesar de que quiere permanecer en el lugar que siempre ha sido su hogar, sabe que tiene que ir al principado y que deberá casarse por motivos políticos con un auténtico desconocido — el actual gobernante de Monteverde.

Allegreto, el joven y carismático asesino de For my Lady's Heart, convertido ahora en un atractivo y peligroso pirata, sólo quiere una cosa en este mundo: recuperar el lugar que le corresponde por derecho en el principado italiano. Y acaba de encontrar la oportunidad perfecta para cumplir sus deseos en la prometida de su mayor enemigo, Lady Elena. Cuando ésta va de camino hacia Monteverde, la secuestra en alta mar y la hace su prisionera.

La lucha acaba de comenzar... y corren el peligro de perder no sólo sus corazones, sino también sus vidas.

Muy pocas veces un libro del género romántico me deja sin palabras y es precisamente lo que me ha ocurrido con Shadowheart. Dentro de este género, éste es único, no hay nada parecido escrito aún y probablemente no lo habrá en un futuro.

Este es el segundo libro de la serie Medieval Hearts y aún no sé por qué no se ha traducido. En él la autora nos narra la historia de Allegreto, el hijo bastardo de Gian, un asesino sin escrúpulos que ya habíamos conocido en Por el Corazón de mi Dama cuando contaba con dieciséis años y Elena, la medio-hermana de Cara, quien fuera dama de compañía de la princesa Melanthe.

La historia comienza en Inglaterra, años después de que Elena fuera rescatada y llevada junto a su hermana. Ahora a los diecisiete años, la joven vive junto con su hermana, Sir Guy y sus sobrinos en un castillo alejado de la corte. Durante años su madrina, la princesa Melanthe la ha preparado intelectualmente para que adquiriera las mejores habilidades en lenguas extranjeras, disposiciones judiciales, métodos de cura, etc.

En su mundo Elena sueña con un ángel negro que siempre la ayuda en los peores momentos. Su hermana mayor constantemente le recrimina lo poco decorosas que son sus actividades y forma de comportarse, pero Elena no escucha y escribe poemas cantándole al amor y a sus pensamientos más íntimos en un idioma que pocos conocen.

Debido a uno de sus actos en pos de mágicos hechizos de amor, su destino se ve torcido cuando el hombre que cree amar la rechaza debido a que es una heredera al trono del Principado de Monteverde y por ende comprometida en matrimonio con Franco Pietro de Riata, gobernante de ese país y enemigo acérrimo de los Navona.

En su viaje hacia su próximo destino es interceptada en el mar por piratas y llevada a una isla en la que finalmente conoce a Allegreto con el nombre de Il Corvo (el cuervo). El encuentro la deja fascinada. Allegreto fascina por su físico, su forma de hablar, sus gestos y al mismo tiempo la aterroriza porque termina

descubriendo que es un asesino pero en la forma de su ángel negro.

Allegreto se aprovecha de su ingenuidad y juega sus mejores cartas valiéndose de métodos terribles que probablemente muchas lectoras no serán capaces de perdonar. La convierte en su prisionera, amante y esposa bajo la peor de las intimidaciones. Esto crea un abismo entre ambos protagonistas y es en el cierre de este espacio en lo que Kinsale demuestra una habilidad absolutamente magistral.

Allegreto es un héroe alfa con personalidad fuerte y dominante, pero más complejo que ninguno que haya leído. Perteneció a los hombres que están fuera de la sociedad y que mastican a los demás en sus restantes categorías y lo escupen hacia fuera como un pasatiempo. Esto es Allegreto, una creación brillante que salta de las páginas. Un asesino entrenado, decidido a recuperar el lugar que le corresponde en el Principado italiano de Monteverde y al que no le importa lo que tenga que hacer para lograr su objetivo o al que deba usar para el fin. Y para llegar a su meta, él ve a Elena de Monteverde como el peón perfecto, sellando así su destino.

Los métodos para coaccionarla serán detestados por muchas lectoras como lo hice yo en su momento y la relación sexual entre ambos se verá incluso polémica. Una de las relaciones sexuales entre protagonistas de la romántica histórica más controversial que haya leído y por esta razón probablemente no sea un libro para todas. No hay ninguna escritora que haya bordeado un campo de minas en este aspecto (comentado hace poco de esta manera por una lectora) como Kinsale. El resultado es confuso, chocante por momentos y asimilado o no si llegamos a entender a Allegreto porque la única forma es leyendo el primero de la serie y analizando su abusiva infancia. Nada justifica los medios que emplea para subyugar a Elena, pero he aquí la destreza de una escritora entre las grandes si no la mejor. En su empleo magistral de los giros y vueltas de la trama y del encausamiento de la relación. Esto es Kinsale en su faceta más oscura y al mismo tiempo brillante. No hay más sinónimos para describirlo. La conversión de asesino despiadado, repulsivo en sus acciones a héroe, es una espada de doble filo que muchas veces se vuelve en contra de las tramas que crean algunas autoras. Kinsale simplemente sorprende porque nos hace respirar arte y magia durante ese proceso. El significado de “héroe torturado” se queda en el camino al caracterizar a este personaje.

Esta novela realmente deja las pistas en el tramo final, donde las sobrepasa con las habituales intrigas políticas históricas de imaginar una utopía renacentista, no es una democracia plena, sino una república cuya princesa crea a base de normas por consenso general. Este gesto audaz por parte de Elena al final da un intento de golpe que hace que este principio sea posible, cuando comienza la tarea de reconciliar a Allegreto con su peor enemigo.

Kinsale es meticulosa en su investigación histórica y en el empleo de diálogos inteligentes adecuados a la época de la trama. No emplea el mismo lenguaje medieval exquisito que en *Por el Corazón de mi Dama*, sino que lo reforma y explota positivamente.

Se trata de una novela atípica en su género. Va más allá del tiempo. Es una historia de familias que han jurado ser enemigos. Una historia sobre la ascensión de una mujer a su lugar legítimo de gobierno y las decisiones tomadas a lo largo del camino. La base de todo, el corazón del libro es Allegreto y su torturada búsqueda por encontrar la redención y dejar ir su vergüenza y su odio.

Toda la historia encandila, pero quizás lo que nos llega como un flechazo al corazón es cuando Elena piensa, después de sus encuentros apasionados con Allegreto que deben ir a confesarse. Allegreto sabe que deberían hacerlo los dos por ir en contra de los mandamientos religiosos, pero cuando llega la oportunidad, Elena no lo hace a menos que Allegreto tenga la misma posibilidad de hacerlo. El problema es que él es consciente de sus muchos crímenes y por ello ha sido excomulgado. Considera que no hay esperanza para él en el cielo, que está fuera de toda redención, pero que ella debe hacerlo. Pero ni la república de Elena, ni la paz, ni el equilibrio político la harán renunciar a su promesa. Ella jamás renunciará a él y su único propósito será salvar su alma.

Shadowheart podría resumirse en una historia oscuramente cautivadora. INTENSA. El viaje de un héroe hacia la absolución de su alma. Shadowheart es Allegreto ¿Recomendable? Absolutamente.

Audrey Ferrer says

Extravagante. Imprevisible. Emocionante. Arriesgada.

Laura Kinsale es una maestra en el arte de hacer de lo impensable, un mundo con tantos matices como su prosa. Es capaz de crear personajes verosímiles con características desconcertantes. Il Corvo me ha maravillado: sensual, irónico, inteligente, ...

Mi único inconveniente es que creo que se han alargado en exceso determinadas situaciones, y desde mi punto de vista no está al nivel de Flores en la tormenta... pero es que pocas obras lo podrán estar (para mi desgracia).

A sus pies, Sra. Kinsale♥♥♥♥

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

Instagram || Twitter || Facebook || Amazon || Pinterest

There's a part of me that's screaming, "Five stars! Five stars! Five stars!" with regard to how I should review this book. To be fair, it's a *really* good book. I'd been wanting to get into Laura Kinsale's works for ever because of how lovingly touted they were in the Smart Bitches's romance-themed book, BEYOND HEAVING BOSOMS. Lately, her books have been going on sale for \$1.99 in the Kindle store and I've been snapping them up left and right.

Elayne is a bit of a wild child growing up in the rural forests of England with occasional tutelage in herbal-type medicine from her godmother. She has a flirtation going with a knight, and despairs a little about her single status but is otherwise content with her life.

All of that changes when Elayne finds out that she's an Italian princess in hiding, sheltered from the chaos and the bloodshed across the water. Don't worry, though. She gets to make up for lost time when one of these power-mad would-be despots hires a bunch of pirates to take Elayne and her guardian, *drugs* her, marries her while drugged and then fakes the consummation, only to rapily accost her later and ensure that there's a legit consummation later.

The perpetrator of these foul deeds is a Bad Man named Allegreto: nobleman, assassin, pirate.

The beginning of the book feels much like a traditional bodice ripper, like something you'd see in the 70s or 80s, which is why the sex in this book stands out. Allegreto might hold all the power in the beginning, but by the end of the book, he is utterly in Elayne's thrall. Also, considering SHADOWHEART was published in 2004 - as a *mainstream* title - it is kinky AF. You wouldn't guess it from that innocent little cover, but there's some serious masochistic/Fem-Dom action up in here.

I was also pleasantly surprised by the court intrigue, the *gorgeous* passages of writing, and the cinematic aspect of the story as it rolls along, with sweeping backgrounds, intense confessions, and heart-stopping betrayals. It made me feel like I was watching *The Princess Bride*, or reading one of those older epics like GONE WITH THE WIND, where the romance in romance novels could often be overshadowed by the plot - and came out all the better, for it.

So why not five stars! five stars! five stars! you ask? Even though there was so much of the story that I *loved*, there were many moments when I did not buy the characters' developments. Elayne's proclivities for domination and inflicting pain seem to come out of nowhere, and I was a little surprised at how quickly and competently she turned Monteverde on its head and gamed the political system with no formal training in such matters (although Allegreto did help her a little, I guess). I was also puzzled by Allegreto's character: in the beginning he is icy, cold, and utterly in control. At the end of the book, he's a hot mess: angsty and weepy, with such soul-wrenching agony that I was half-tempted to put on some *My Chemical Romance* or some *Smile Empty Soul* in sympathy. I don't mind the direction his character took, but I would have liked to have understood it more.

SHADOWHEART is a really dark, sexy medieval romance, and if you enjoy stories about taboo romance and court intrigue, I think you'll really like this book. Don't believe me? Just check out some of the quotes in my status updates for this book. Go ahead, I'll wa - what's that? You already bought the book? You're halfway done with it *already*?

rubs hands together evilly

Excellent.

4 to 4.5 stars

jenjn79 says

Shadowheart wasn't quite what I expected it to be. After reading the reviews at Amazon and B&N, I thought it would be a lot darker, more erotic in nature. But it looks as though the reviewers were overreacting a bit to the so-called deviant sex in the book.

I can't say I particularly liked the book, but I also didn't dislike it. It's a nice story - key word there 'story'. It was kind of like a fairytale...not one of those cheesy, sanitized children's versions, but a real one with darkness and evil and a moral. The book was long and tedious at times, with a lot of wasted space on inane events. But overall, it was a fairly interesting storyline. There were just a lot of things I took issue with.

I think one of the critical errors of the books is the way Kinsale handled the POVs. The first 250+ pages (approximately) are told strictly from Elena's POV. You get no sense of Allegretto other than through Elena's eyes, no insight into his character through his POV. Then suddenly halfway through the book she slips into his POV for a short while. After that, the book is still mostly Elena, but once in a while, you get a glimpse of Allegretto's thoughts, just not enough. Allegretto is such a complicated character, who does things that are unexpected and unexplained. The book would have been served more if she had used his POV more, and it certainly would have worked out better if she had not ignored him for the first half of the book. Focusing so much on Elena kept the readers from connecting with Allegretto and understanding his character.

Another issue with the story is that it is supposedly directly connected to another book, in which Allegretto is first introduced. The plot of that book apparently deals with the time in Monteverde when the revolution began. Kinsale does a poor job of relaying the history of the fictional place in the beginning of the book. For readers who did not read this earlier book, you're left a bit out in the wind as to the situation, the events, and other aspects that would have made things clearer. Kinsale fell into the trap many authors do in assuming that if you are reading this book then you read the other and therefore don't need explanations. It just made things confusing for a while.

Issue 3 (and it's 3 sub-issues)...ah, the big S&M issue. The first comment I have to make here is: good grief, if readers got all freaked out about what they read in this book, I'd hate to see what would happen if they saw some truer S&M. Because though at it most elemental, what happens in this book would be considered sadomasochism, it is hardly true S&M. I'd venture to say that anyone in that realm would say it was barely S&M. The extent of it in the book involves some biting and the use of fingernails. That's all. No paddles, no whips, no tools of any kind. Just the biting and use of fingernails. Yes, the sex was violent and used pain liberally, but it wasn't hardcore. It just wasn't the pretty stuff of typical romance novels. If anything, I'd say the book had more of a FemDom (female domination) aspect than an S&M one - though I suppose the two are in reality heavily intertwined.

The issue with the S&M element lies not with its existence, but with how Kinsale presented it. Which leads to sub-issue one: Elena's age. In the beginning of the book, she is 17 years old (this is a historical after all, females are generally young). But she is an innocent young girl with no worldly knowledge. Then suddenly she is a FemDom who inflicts pain. There's no transition, no learning process for her. She's just suddenly a Dominatrix. It doesn't work and leads to an element of disbelief because the reader has a hard time accepting that she would know about any of these issues without some sort of learning process. There should have been a transition, with Elena gradually discovering the elements of pain and control.

Sub-issue 2 in this area relates to the POV issue. Since Kinsale does not use Allegretto's POV very much, and not at all for the first half of the book, the reader gets no insight into his actions. Why does he allow Elena to dominate him? Why does he submit? Why does he enjoy the pain she inflicts? Allegretto is built up as this true Alpha male who likes to be in control, who has no feelings and kills without remorse. Then he lets Elena do what she does to him, and the reader is given only small crumbs as to his inner thoughts and reasoning. Like the issue with Elena's age, this also fosters disbelief. How is the reader supposed to accept his actions without any kernels as to why he allows it? You get a slight impression now and then that he is allowing it as his penance for all the sins he has committed in his lifetime, but you never get a true insight into his character. It was just really hard to accept his submissiveness when you aren't given much insight into his character.

Sub-issue 3...and this one is more just a personal preference, than a real issue probably. But pretty much

every single sexual scene in the book relied on the pain/pleasure - S&M aspect. There was hardly ever any gentleness between them. I had no problem with the S&M elements, but I thought there should not have been such a heavy reliance on it. I had a hard time accepting the love between them when their only interactions involved dominating and causing pain. It was like their bond depended solely on pain and domination. I suppose there is nothing wrong with that; it is probably a true element to some real S&M practitioners, but for a main-stream romance novel, it didn't quite work.

The love between them overall was hard to comprehend. It's built upon a typical historical romance premise of kidnapper/abductee...the whole victim falls for her capturer thing. It's a little too typical. Aside from that, you get no understanding of why Allegretto loves her and why Elena accepts who he is (after she complains about it for most of the book). I just did not feel the connection between them. They are just supposed to love each other. But most of the time, they just seemed like 2 characters who liked to have unorthodox sex. Yet Elena said numerous times that she would sacrifice going to Heaven for him. I didn't buy it.

Which leads to the last issue with the book - and again this is a personal preference one - is the very heavy reliance on religion. One of the main themes of the book is sin and redemption. For a true atheist like me, it made me want to roll my eyes half the time. But on a more general religious aspect...both characters claim to be Catholics who believe in sin and heaven and hell, and all that. They want to confess their sins and be redeemed, be 'good' Catholics. Yet both characters engaged in pagan practices and never seemed to have any qualms about it. Every other action they committed was intertwined with their religious beliefs, but their pagan practices were ignored and accepted. That seemed a bit wrong to me.

Okay...well, after all that...Shadowheart was a so-so book. Too many things about it bothered me to make me like it more. I often found myself enjoying the 'plot' of the book (where Monteverde is freed from its violent oppression) more than the characters and the supposed romance. Still, the story was long and tedious. I kept putting it down to take a break to do something fun. I had to work a bit to make it through the book. But it was an interesting story. And while I applaud Kinsale for delving into non-traditional sexual practices, I wish she would done it more realistically and explored the characters psyches more. In the end, the book has its virtues and it's a curious read, but I don't think I'd want to pay \$8 for it. Luckily I got it for a buck.

KatieV says

The progression of their relationship and the way they complemented one another was amazing to read.

I read a lot of romance and much of it doesn't stick with me, but I'm still thinking about this book after finishing it. I didn't expect to like the "femdom" element to their sexual relationship, but it made sense in context. The H was still all alpha-male and the h was strong yet kind and not a shrew at all. I think much of her roughness with him in bed had to do with the fact that she no longer had any power in her life. She was afraid, confused, horrified by the H and yet attracted to him. He, on the other hand, had a deep self loathing that her biting/scratching satisfied. Personally, I was left with the feeling that their future sexual relationship would be a combination of tenderness and some kink (because they both like it) but above all, they would be making love.

The historical detail, language, and love story were all fascinating. It was definitely refreshing to have fully fleshed out characters in a romance novel and a dangerous alpha-hero who was not a ranting/raving jerk. Allegretto was fascinating, multi-dimensional (and sexy!). Elena was strong, yet not TSTL. Too often these writers seem to make a strong h synonymous with being bullheaded and waspish to the point of stupidity

Jill says

I experienced this story as an AUDIOBOOK - if you have never read a Kinsale book there are a few things you need to know:

- Laura Kinsale books are angsty.
- Things are NEVER tidy
- The heroes are always flawed
- The heroines usually get hurt by the heroes

AND MOST OF ALL -

- Laura Kinsale's writing talent MAY ruin you for less gifted authors. Now that I have read her work, I get far less enjoyment reading/ listening to historical romance/ fantasy stories that are written by lesser authors. Kinsale has an almost magical ability to rip you from reality and drop you smack in the middle of a pirate ship, a desert or a hidden kingdom but it is her partnership with the most amazing narrator EVER - Nicholas Boulton, that fills these new locales with vivid colors and amazing people.

I do not care for angsty books-(period.) They are unpleasant, frustrating and frazzle me to discomfort. If my reading is interrupted before the misunderstanding is resolved (as is common when you have 2 kids) I am not a happy camper so I have always screened and avoided those reads as a general rule. All Kinsale books are ANGSTY and if I had read them rather than listened they would have lost a star rating from me by default. The unpleasantness of conflict based on unnecessary secrets, misunderstandings, pride, personal demons, villains or self doubt always takes away from my overall experience but when Nicholas Boulton reads to me, all is forgiven. His voice, acting, interpretation and most of all, companionship on these literary journeys are more than enough compensation for any discomfort Kinsale imposes upon me. And the reason I feel distress is because she makes me care, she forces me to believe, she puts me into the story and I suffer along with the characters. She is an extraordinary talent and her books are a life experience.

Crista says

I finished reading this book several days ago. I usually write a review immediately after reading a book, but with this one, frankly, I didn't know what to rate it, or what to say about it. As a usually very opinionated and "sure" type of person...this was a first for me.

Laura Kinsale is not your ordinary romance novel writer. This needs to be understood first and foremost before reading anything by her. She does not write light and fluffy romances that make you sigh and smile. Her novels challenge you to look beyond the words into the characters and the time in which they lived. She is not a "quick read" and reading her books will push you...both in literary and literal senses.

Shadowheart is INTENSE, and quite frankly, probably not for everyone. Here's what I liked and didn't:
SPOILER ALERT (For those who haven't read it yet)!

Here's what bothered me:

1. This is the second book in a series and I should've read *For My Lady's Heart*, the preceding book first.
2. This book is told through Elena's perspective. I would usually be alright with this, but Allegretto was too dominating a character to be ignored. I long to have coffee with this author to ask her questions about Allegretto. This book did not give me nearly enough of him and his thoughts to satisfy me, rather, it just left me frustrated. However, kudos to Kinsale for creating a character so compelling to make me care!
3. This is a "wordy" novel, and although I resisted, there were parts that I wanted to skim over. My advise is to push through and read every word. You'll miss things if you don't. Again, not a "light and fun" read.
4. This book contains some the most "controversial" sex that I've ever read. I do not read erotica so the

nature of Allegretto and Elena's sexual relationship was different for me, however, I understood it. Elena needs to regain control back over her life and Allegretto's past requires penance. The first couple of times, I liked the sex scenes, but by the end I wished that they would move past some of that to get to a more "healthy" intimacy. Why did it ALWAYS have to be about pain, submission, cruelty, and domination?

Here's what captivated me:

1. Allegretto. Allegretto. Allegretto. Allegretto. Dark Angel, Raven, Il Corvo...whatever name he's going by at the time...it doesn't matter. HE is what I am going to remember about this book. He is a cold blooded killer, and although he despises what he is, he is also resigned to "who he has been made to be". He kills without mercy and is as "bad" as they get but he also has deep regrets and feels beyond redemption. I think the word "tortured hero" doesn't even begin to touch this man. I will not forget him.
2. Elena. Elena. Elena. I loved this woman. She goes from flighty girl to regal leader in the span of this book. Her transformation is gradual and we get to see it up close. She challenges Allegretto making him a better man throughout the novel. In one part of the book Allegretto is talking about Elena and says this..."Nay, I have no heart. My father hacked it out of me long ago, for his convenience. But she is my compass and measure now."..... Need I say more?
3. This is an "epic" sort of novel. It spans time, distance, and focuses on both past and present. It is a story of families sworn to be enemies. A story about one woman's ascension to her rightful place of rule, and the decisions made along the way. Ultimately, this story is about Allegretto finding redemption and letting go of his shame and hate.

I wish I knew him better. Had Kinsale done this, I think this might rank right up there, but for me as it stands, I will always feel a bit let down and deprived of this unbelievable man's motives, thoughts, and feelings.

Caz says

I've given this an A+ for narration and a B+ for content - I'm calling it 4.5 stars here

Having very much enjoyed *For My Lady's Heart* in audio format, I've been eagerly looking forward to its sequel, **Shadowheart**, which picks up the story of Allegretto della Navona, the ruthless young assassin who was one of the major secondary characters in that novel. He's certainly an interesting choice for the hero of an historical romance but I knew that if anyone could make a murderer into a romantic hero, it would be Ms. Kinsale.

She does that and then some. Allegretto is utterly captivating, despite the terrible things he has done, his wicked past, and his dark thoughts. At times, he's so charmingly seductive that it's difficult to believe he has gone through life leaving a trail of dead bodies in his wake and then will come a moment when the ruthless assassin comes to the fore and reminds us abruptly of that fact. He's a very complex character and his path towards redemption, both spiritually and literally, is fittingly arduous. It would have been easy to turn him into a tortured soul who was badly misunderstood, to build on those flashes of conscience he displayed in **For My Lady's Heart** and have him reforming somewhat in the intervening years. But this is Laura Kinsale, and she's never one to take the easy way out. Her achievement in making the listener care about a man without conscience, without heart, and, given his status as an ex-communicate, without a soul, is nothing sort of masterly.

It's clear in the previous book that Allegretto is a terribly disturbed and conflicted character. The bastard son of Gian Navona, he was taught to kill at a young age and put to work as an assassin. He has never known love or affection - at sixteen, everyone around him knows what he is and what he is capable of - and they are terrified of him. But he also shows himself to have a conscience during the events of that story, especially at

the very end, when he arrives at Savernake, the home of Melanthe's waiting woman, Cara, with the latter's six-year-old half sister, Elena. Elena is, in reality, the sole heiress to the city-state of Monteverde in Northern Italy, a city torn asunder by the feud between the rival houses of Riata and Navona. Elena had been held hostage by the Riata as a way of blackmailing Cara into murdering her mistress. When Cara failed and the Riata would have killed Elena, Allegretto spirited her away to safety and England, where she is brought up in the house of her sister and brother-in-law, with no idea of her true identity.

When, at the age of seventeen, Elena discovers the truth, she is distraught. She has no wish to leave England and wants nothing to do with Monteverde, but she is given no alternative. Her godmother, the Lady Melanthe, has arranged her marriage to Franco Pietro, the head of the Riata family as a way to end the strife that is tearing Monteverde apart.

On the journey, Elena's ship is attacked by pirates and she is taken to the island of "Il Corvo" (the Raven), a man who is clearly much to be feared. He is also the most beautiful man Elena has ever seen and seems strangely familiar to her. Il Corvo is none other than Allegretto della Navona, the same man who rescued Elena from the Riata over a decade previously, and who now intends to use her to stake his own claim to the throne of Monteverde.

As the story progresses, Elena discovers an abiding love for her homeland and the courage to do what she must in order to bring peace. Her transformation from a naïve young woman into a forceful head of state is remarkable, although dealing with the nature of her feelings for Allegretto seems at times to be even more difficult than brokering peace between the warring factions of the Riata and the Navona. Franco Pietro seems willing to bury the hatchet but Allegretto is not - until circumstances force him to work with his enemy in order to prevent disaster.

As a piece of historical fiction, a historical thriller, a story of revenge and redemption, **Shadowheart** works brilliantly. The hero – or perhaps I should say, anti-hero – is an utterly compelling character who, despite his catalogue of terrible deeds, is devastatingly attractive and he is brought vividly to life in Nicholas Boulton's masterful and multi-layered performance.

As a romance, I found *Shadowheart* to be slightly less successful. I understand that there was some degree of controversy when the book first came out which mostly related to the unconventional sexual relationship between Allegretto and Elena. It's probably going too far to call it sado-masochistic, but nearly all their sexual encounters involve Elena inflicting pain upon her lover – usually by using teeth and nails, and at one point, a leather strap or belt – and enjoying it.

I can rationalise it, certainly. The first time they have sex, it's little more than rape, and during that, Elena bites Allegretto so hard that she draws blood. That's understandable as she's trying to defend herself; yet even in those circumstances, she realises that she enjoyed both inflicting the pain and seeing Allegretto's reaction to it.

Their sexual encounters after this follow a similar pattern, with Elena wanting to hurt Allegretto in some way, and he inviting her to do so. I can certainly understand that she might want revenge on him for forcing her and that he could be allowing her to exact it because he knows what he did was wrong. I can also argue that Allegretto is a man so filled with self-loathing that he would see that sort of punishment as his due. He's a murderer; he's unprincipled, ruthless, and evil so why would he be deserving of love or tenderness or affection?

Elena's life has been turned upside down and she is completely powerless to do anything about it. Here is the most gorgeous man in Christendom – a man who has done innumerable terrible things in his young life, a man who is so terrified at the thought of losing control that it makes him almost physically ill - and he is offering her power, power over him.

That's what my head tells me about why these two people might have entered into a sexual relationship based on pain. But my gut tells me that the whole "hurt me while we're having sex" thing doesn't scream "romance". In fact, it wasn't until much later in the book, where the relationship between Elena and Allegretto had to take a back-seat to the political intrigue and machinations taking place in the rest of the story, that I began to feel a deeper emotional connection developing between them, which, in one scene during Allegretto's imprisonment was so powerful as to have almost made me sob out loud.

This aspect of the novel seems to polarise readers and I can see why. I also found it difficult to reconcile the seventeen-year-old Elena who becomes alarmed at the over-enthusiastic kisses of the man she wants to marry with the seventeen-year-old Elena who finds she likes to hurt her lover during sex and is comfortable enough with that to suggest role-play in the bedroom that involves her tying him up and slapping him with a leather belt.

I'm not a prude. I don't read a lot of erotica, although I do read it occasionally, and I'm more than okay with raunchy sex scenes in romantic novels. But the infliction of pain made for uncomfortable listening and, dare I say, felt a little out of place in a romance.

That said, however, the parts of the novel that deal with the emotional rather than the sexual side of the relationship between the protagonists are very intense and deeply romantic. Allegretto's concern for Elena's immortal soul and his desperation at the thought of her dying unshriven are beautifully written, with the sort of emotional punch that made me feel as though my heart had been ripped out and stomped on.

Nicholas Boulton is narrating once more, and again delivers a superb performance. He perfectly captures Allegretto's mercurial nature, switching seamlessly between devastating sensuality, ruthless pragmatism, and murderous intent. His Allegretto just oozes sex appeal, while at the same time flawlessly conveys the sense of the barely leashed darkness he carries inside him. I was bowled over by the raw intensity of his interpretation, especially in those moments which – metaphorically – strip Allegretto bare and allow us a glimpse of the man beneath the surface. The scenes that really stand out for me are the one I've already mentioned, during Allegretto's imprisonment, and the one towards the end of the book where he finally faces his demons.

Although most of the action takes place in Italy, Allegretto's associates are a motley bunch – Italian, Turkish and English – and Mr. Boulton navigates his way easily through a myriad of different characters and accents without putting a foot wrong, from the authoritative, gruff, Italianate tones of Franco Pietro to the quiet yet lethal Turkish servant Zafer and the bluff, English mercenary, Philip Welles.

His interpretation of Elena works very well, too, with her progression from girlhood to maturity being marked by subtle changes of tone and a growing confidence in her speech. All the secondary characters are appropriately and distinctly voiced and I did enjoy the brief reunion with Ruck and Melanthe near the beginning of the book.

While taking place in the same historical period as *For My Lady's Heart*, there is much less use of archaic language and expression in **Shadowheart**. The author has said that this is principally because the characters are speaking French and Italian rather than English for most of the time (which is consistent with *For My Lady's Heart* – when characters spoke in languages other than English, the middle-English expressions disappeared), so some may find it more approachable in both print and audio than the earlier book.

I agonised over a final grading for this fabulous, difficult, and sometimes downright uncomfortable audiobook. I loved the complexity of the story, the political machinations, the intrigue, and the setting. I adored Allegretto, the ultimate in dark and tortured heroes; I liked seeing the rather naïve and nervous Elena transform into a strong ruler and equally strong woman. I have to be honest, however, and confess that I downgraded the story a little because I didn't find the sexual relationship between Allegretto and Elena in the

early part of the book to be convincing or romantic. However, the intensity of the emotions in the second half and the beauty of the writing bumped it back up again.

In all honesty, **Shadowheart** is probably not a book for everyone. It's intense, brilliant, and rewarding, but can also be very problematic. Yet it's an audiobook I will certainly revisit as the performance was utterly mesmerising and, in spite of my reservations, I was completely enthralled by the story.

Sally ?? says

Although I'm giving Shadowheart the same rating as For My Lady's Heart, I much preferred it. It's probably more of a 4.5 and FMLH is more of a 3.5.

This was much easier to read than FMLH. I don't know whether that was because the language seemed to have changed, there wasn't nearly as much medieval speech, or whether the story got going much quicker, or perhaps both. I haven't read the condensed version at the end but I assumed that the condensed versions were the same books but with more modern language so I wasn't quite sure whether that was needed in this case.

There was a scene towards the beginning of Allegretto and Elena's relationship that did make me a little uncomfortable - I'm not sure if it was intended as rape or not. I'm leaning towards 'yes, it was' and I'm not really here for that. But maybe I'd change my mind on a re-read. I have the audiobook so I probably will listen to that at some point.

Allegretto is a complicated character and I love my dark, twisted, tortured and complicated heroes. He was raised to be an assassin, he's been killing since before the age of nine, and he's bloody good at it. He hates that he made to be who he is, but he never tries to change that and I don't think he really wants to. He knows that he'll be going to hell when he dies and is determined to put that off for as long as possible. It's strange (but in a good way) to read about a hero that doesn't have a heart (and I know in a lot of HR a hero will go on about how he's heartless and that gets dropped pretty soon but this is different). He says his father cut it out when he was young and kept it for his convenience (or something like that, I don't have the exact quote).

Elena is not one of my favourite heroines but I did enjoy that she was a strong character. She did the best to take control of the situations she found herself in, she made tough decisions that didn't really make her happy for the good of her people, she didn't let herself be walked all over.

The plot did drag in places towards the end and there were times when I thought it was coming to end only to realise that it wasn't and that something else was going to happen but overall another great read.

Pepa says

Leer a esta autora siempre es un placer. No es una lectura ágil, sino densa. Pero me gusta mucho su forma de escribir y disfruto mucho de su lectura.

El problema ha sido la historia. No me ha gustado, creo que en muchos momentos la alarga sin ningún sentido y el tema de los personajes no me ha cuajado nada.

No me ha dado la sensación de que esta jovencita de apenas 19 años esté cualificada para hacer (ella solita) todo lo que hace... la evolución a nivel sexual es, cuanto menos, sorprendente y esa faceta oculta me ha dejado pasmada (literalmente). No cabía en mi sorpresa.

Il Cuervo irreconocible, y eso no me gusta nada. Tenía un filón, en serio. Un hombre con el corazón oscuro, frío y calculador...y qué me he encontrado???? Leerlo para descubrirlo, pero ha sido todo un desengaño.

Naksed says

DNF at Chapter 18 out of 32.

I didn't get this at all. The whole bdsm thing was so cringeworthy especially as it felt like he was reliving his childhood abuse at the hands of his monster father. As for her, the dominatrix, sex maniac persona was barf. I couldn't care less about the swashbuckling adventure and political intrigue either. I am definitely in the minority when it comes to this author but she is simply not for me. My second attempt at a book from her with the same DNF result :(

Ruth says

I think Laura Kinsale is my absolutely favorite historical romance author. Her stories are so intense, so well-researched (as if she'd lived in the period herself), and just such wonderful storytelling!!!

Regan Walker says

Unusual, Fascinating and Disturbing

To say this book was difficult to review is an understatement. Let me say at the outset that Kinsale writes brilliantly and has obviously done an amazing job of presenting the historical setting of 14th century Northern Italy. The story certainly held my interest; however, it is also sometimes disturbing and, in places, had me figuratively tearing out my hair. Some historical romance readers will have difficulty with parts of it.

This is the sequel to *For My Lady's Heart* and much of our introduction to the hero, Allegreto, can be found there, should you want to read it. *Shadowheart* won the RITA in 2005 for Best Historical Romance, which is interesting in itself, as you'll see from my comments below. Unlike the prequel, this one is only sprinkled with Middle English, and much better for the change—we can actually understand what Kinsale is saying.

Set in the late 14th-century, Allegreto, the 16-year-old assassin we met in book one, and bastard son of the Italian Navona family, now in his late 20's, has one goal—to reclaim his birthright in Monteverde (Northern Italy). He is strong, mysterious and ruthless. To secure his claim, he uses treachery to capture the last heir and princess of Monteverde, 17-year-old Elena. Much happened after her capture that bothered me. I apologize for some spoilers, but I can't review this book without them.

Allegreto (called "Il Corvo" after his island and "pirate" to Elena), rapes her and then calls her "wife," though there is no marriage nor vows of any kind. How he intended to claim her lands with no lawful marriage mystified me but that's how the story begins. That Elena, who seemed a bright, independent young woman, could be so witless as to walk into his trap and believe that he had married her and consummated the marriage while she was drugged was just bizarre. She never challenges it, though with her personality, one would have expected her to.

As to Elena and Allegreto's sexual relationship, I just have to say it was strange for a 17-year-old innocent. While I don't typically quote other reviewers, the following assessment so closely paralleled my own views I thought to use it: "Had she written a bigger buildup of Elena's obsession with her "angel" of the past so there was a foundation for the present relationship, then made Elena a reluctant apprentice in the S&M and bondage in an effort to "save" Allegreto's black heart and soul, the scenes could have been made darkly beautiful and believable. As it was, we had to make some lightning-fast adjustments to keep up with the young girl we were first introduced to who was alarmed by the aggressive kisses of a romantic knight, and within a matter of weeks morphed into a disturbing and disturbed seductress. We were given no reference point from which to understand the flowering of the relationship between Elena and Allegreto, other than the point at which they came together to draw blood. As a result, we have a very hard time envisioning a happily-ever-anything for these two." I, too, found it unbelievable. One could expect Allegreto to engage in such behavior given his background, but Elena? Raised as an educated young woman in a happy home in England, it was hard to believe.

Almost all the story is in Elena's point of view so we know little about Allegreto's thoughts. We do know (early on) that on his island kingdom he pursued the occult and was creating a generation of young assassins in his own image. Elena, finding that disturbing as well she should, is naïve enough to believe if he promises not to train her own children (when they come) in his murderous ways, those children will somehow be different from their father or the assassin culture all around them. That made her look witless.

The change in the hero and heroine over the course of the book was interesting: she started out weak and became a dominating princess and he started out strong and ended up her love slave.

I wouldn't recommend this book without the disclaimers in this review. But for those who don't mind all that, I could say it deserves 4 stars simply for the achievement it represents.

Maria Clara says

¿Qué puedo decir? Como siempre, Laura Kinsale, consigue crear historias fantásticas de héroes oscuros y de damiselas a las que no les asusta ningún lobo feroz... Una historia diferente, única, vibrante...

Ann has a dirty mouth says

This book is so much better than the cover and plot summary led me to believe. I have been taking an indefinite hiatus from historical novels for the better part of this year because I became very burned out on them, especially Regencies. I have a feeling when I read many historical romances that the characters are not really in the past- they are modern actors wearing old fashioned costumes for a play. I also really, really hate the historical fiction trope of women being "ruined" after losing their virginity, which may be historically accurate but is also disgusting. I really have no interest in reading books where characters of either gender are shamed for their sexual behavior.

One thing that I miss in historicals, however, especially older historicals or those by authors like Kinsale that have been doing this for a long time and really know their game, is the epic sweep of the stories. A quality historical romance will make you feel like you are witnessing moments in history where the world changed. The setting to this story is lush, beautiful and completely unique. Unlike books where the setting is merely window dressing, the Renaissance court intrigues are essential in driving the plot and explaining the characters motivations. They are people of the past informed by geography, religion, ancient feuds and blood

ties.

This book is also amazing and unique to me because Elena started the story out as a powerless teenager and was able to use her sexual power to gain political power and strength in other areas of her life. I don't think I have ever read a book with sex scenes like these. They are nothing terribly kinky, but unlike many books where the heroine ends up protected in a bedroom as a housewife Elena is really able to take charge. I love that she is able to dominate instead of being subdued, and to turn the tables and become a Queen rather than a captive.

Four stars rather than five because the book really does drag at the end, and could have been 100 pages shorter in my opinion. This would still make it much longer than a standard romance novel. I haven't even mentioned how amazingly sexy Allegretto is, so I will let it go without being said. He was an amazing character and I will probably read the other book in the series on the strength of how amazing he was alone!
