



## A Talent for Trickery

*Alissa Johnson*

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## **A Talent for Trickery** Alissa Johnson **The Lady is a Thief**

Years ago, Owen Renderwell earned acclaim—and a title—for the dashing rescue of a kidnapped duchess. But only a select few knew that Scotland Yard's most famous detective was working alongside London's most infamous thief...and his criminally brilliant daughter, Charlotte Walker.

Lottie was like no other woman in Victorian England. She challenged him. She dazzled him. She questioned everything he believed and everything he was, and he has never wanted anyone more. And then he lost her.

Now a private detective on the trail of a murderer, Owen has stormed back into Lottie's life. She knows that no matter what they may pretend, he will always be a man of the law and she a criminal. Yet whenever he's near, Owen has a way of making things complicated...and long for a future that can never be theirs.

## **A Talent for Trickery Details**

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Author : Alissa Johnson

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## From Reader Review A Talent for Trickery for online ebook

### Joanna Loves Reading says

3.5 Stars — wavering between rounding up or down.

Really enjoyed the writing style of Johnson but felt the romance was underwhelming.

Thanks to Lorii and Mariana for the buddy read!

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### snowplum says

If you devour historical romances, I have no reason not to recommend this one; but if you only read one once in a while, I'm not going to say you need to run out and get A Talent for Trickery. It is a character-focused story -- much of it is internal (Lottie's endlessly conflicted thoughts) or intimate (as in, conversations taking place among a couple of people in the privacy of a home, not intimate X-rated). At the very end there is a confrontation with a dangerous villain, but that content is not the strong point of the book, and it represents only about 1 or 2% of the story. The strong point of the story is that it is about a couple (both of whom are intelligent and have their own talents and interests) overcoming distrust and their own personal baggage in order to be brave enough to explore their feelings for each other. The biggest weakness of the story is that the source of their distrust is reasonable, but it is unnaturally prolonged by the author in order to create the circumstances of the book.

My biggest personal problem with the story is that there are two daughters who idealize their sadistic, exploitive, criminal father to a pathological degree. I'm not saying that the psychology of it is impossible, I'm merely expressing a personal preference that I don't like to dwell in a story of that sort of result of emotional abuse. For some people, such a story may be healing or empowering, and some may be relatively indifferent to that angle of the book; but I ended up skimming past a lot of the passages about exactly how awful this man was to his daughters and just how traumatizing it was for them to be disillusioned after a very, very long time of denying the truth. I am glad that Charlotte and Esther are finally free at the end of this book to find real love elsewhere instead of being trapped in a fantasy that they constructed in order to sustain the false belief that their father loved them, but I never enjoy reading a story about someone who was genuinely unloved by a parent and whose emotional landscape is entirely shaped by that sad fact.

Ultimately, I think I would read something else by Alissa Johnson, but I would be careful to check a couple of reviews first and make sure it doesn't have a similarly depressing/upsetting background before I get into it.

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### Nadine Jones says

*Why haven't I read an Alissa Johnson book before????*

This was so good. Really a cut above. The dialogue flows so naturally.

*Gabriel stepped forward from the windows. "Certain you don't know it?"*

*She looked up. "Yes."*

*"Why should we believe you?"*

*"Still the thickest of the three, aren't you?" She glanced at Owen. "Why ever have you kept him around so long?"*

*Owen shrugged lightly. "He's a good shot."*

This was a lot of fun, with interesting characters, witty repartee, villainous action, and a romance that builds on a past friendship.

The only off-note for me was when Owen kept pestering Lottie to tell him all the details of a traumatic night when she was 9 and saw her father shot. There was no point to that, it had nothing to do with the case and it didn't do anything to change their relationship, it felt invasive.

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## **OLT says**

Alissa Johnson, IMO, is a quietly dependable historical romance writer. She often flies under the radar of HR readers, because, perhaps, her stories are not splashy, super-sexy or fast-moving. I like her quiet relationship stories and this one, which actually has a bit more action in it than is usual for Johnson, shines more in the H/h romance and in the family dynamics of the h and her two siblings than in any of the moments of "high drama".

Heroine Lottie Walker is the daughter of a now-deceased thief and code-master. The hero Owen Renderwell, now a private investigator, had been a Scotland Yard detective some 8 years ago and had exposed the father's criminal activities and forced him to cooperate with the Yard in criminal investigations. During this collaboration, things went wrong and the father was killed.

Now, many years later, Lottie resents Owen, blaming him for how her father was treated and for how things ended. She and her young adult sister Esther and adolescent brother Peter have moved on to a "respectable" life using the last name Bales and moving out of London to a new home, hoping to avoid any notoriety and any revenge by criminals the father may have crossed or double-crossed in his criminal dealings.

Owen comes back into their lives, needing Lottie's help to catch a murderer who is leaving coded messages. Since Lottie was familiar with her father's coding systems, he is hoping she will be able to decipher these messages. And there's the matter of the father's journals, some of which had been handed over to Scotland Yard years ago, but he suspects that there are more still in Lottie's possession. And it seems that perhaps Owen has been followed by some criminal or criminals who seem to want to do harm to the Walker-Bales siblings.

Add to that some complicated relationships. There's the romantic one between Lottie and Owen. Eight years ago she was attracted to him but now is left with deep resentment after the death of her father. They need to clear up all misunderstandings from the past. And the family dynamics are a bit messed up. Both sisters have a few secrets from each other and, in addition, both have been very careful to keep Peter, who was only 4 when his father died, ignorant of their past life. Turns out that may not have been such a good thing.

That's the best part of this novel. Getting all the relationships in order. Getting all the secrets out in the open

and promoting real communication with each other. I found the romance to be very satisfying and also enjoyed seeing the siblings straighten out their family relationships, which had been messed up by their charming, charismatic con man of a father.

Esther's story is the next one up in the series. She's a real firecracker. I'm hoping her book delivers on this.

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## Jaclyn says

*A Talent for Trickery* found itself on my reading radar because it features a heroine with a checkered, criminal past and a hero that's an investigator. I was pretty confident that this was going to be a great combination. I was not disappointed.

Owen Renderwell first encountered Charlotte Walker years ago when he worked with her criminally inclined father. However, they did not part on good terms. Charlotte has always believed that Owen took the credit that was due to her father, leaving her father to die in disgrace and necessitating the need for her and her siblings to disguise their origins. Years later, Owen has come knocking on Lottie's door to ask for her help. Needless to say, Lottie isn't exactly jumping at the chance to help Owen, and it certainly doesn't help that Owen has not a clue as to why Lottie is angry with him. Sparks will fly!

*A Talent for Trickery* is a really good historical romance. Not only does the author create an interesting premise (law maker vs. law breaker) there's also some real intellectual meat to the story. It's interesting that the novel explores the ideas of crime and class and how morality is for the rich, who have a number of choices available to them. For Charlotte and her siblings, helping their father with his criminal endeavors was not something they had a choice in. I was pleasantly surprised that this was not glossed over in the novel. Charlotte's conflicting attitude about her background and her initial willingness to help her father was explored much more than I would have expected, giving this romance a more serious tone. The ideas behind class and crime are also what make Owen and Charlotte's relationship more complex than many of the romances that I've read. The author spends a significant amount of time resolving the differences in both their class and their moral outlook. Charlotte has very fluid ideas of morality whereas Owen's are more rigid, for a romance to flourish those differences needed to be resolved and the author does this.

The mystery element to *A Talent for Trickery* is another facet that makes this a strong read. What draws Owen back into Charlotte's orbit is his need for help in breaking a cipher. This cipher may be one of Charlotte's father's and Owen needs access to his journals if he's going to crack it. However, the murder that necessitates Owen's return into Charlotte's life might also be the reason that Charlotte and her two siblings are now in danger. Like the romance, the mystery was also well executed and served a larger purpose and further developed the romance. Without the need to work together to decipher the mysterious correspondence, Charlotte and Owen would never have gotten to know one another again.

While not a steamy romance, *A Talent for Trickery* was a well-crafted story. Not only were the hero and heroine well developed, but so too were the secondary characters of Charlotte's siblings and Owen's fellow investigators. I can only hope that Esther (Charlotte's sister) gets her own story.

So if you're looking for a romance that has a bit of meat to it, *A Talent for Trickery* more than fits the bill. This one gets bonus points for featuring an unusual heroine and her unusual family. I can't wait for more in this series.

Originally reviewed at The Book Adventures.

## ? Kimberly says

### Five reasons to grab A Talent for Trickery

**The backstory:** Owen Renderwell helped rescue a kidnapped duchess with the aid of a thief and his brilliant daughter Charlotte Walker. The thief ended up dead and Charlotte along with her siblings ended up in the countryside under assumed names. Owen got all the glory and a title to boot. Owen was smitten with Charlotte and reached out over the years, but she refused to see him and returned his letters unopened.

**The situation:** Someone is murdering folks in London and leaving cryptic messages. Viscount Renderwell, now working as a private detective seeks help from the Walkers, Charlotte in particular. The setup for both the romance and the suspense was brilliant, engaging me as the reader from the start.

**The characters:** Charlotte (Lottie), having grown up with a thief for a father has developed into a strong, somewhat outspoken lady. I loved her remarks and the banter that ensued upon Owen's arrival. Owen, the poor smitten sod, Charlotte both fascinates and confounds him. He is hoping this case allows them to connect again,. It won't be easy as she is very angry with him. Owen is use to being the leader and quickly takes charge. Charlotte on the other hand will never accept second in command making things interesting. Their chemistry was sizzling and they were equally matched.

**Secondary characters:** All were well-developed and added to the story. Ester, Lottie's younger sister is a tad scary but I adored her and look forward to her story. Their younger brother Peter at fifteen considers himself the man of the house and is not aware of the truth behind his father or his sister's past. Gabriel and Samuel are private detectives who work with Owen and I am curious to learn more. It is clear the three men trust each other and we see hints of another budding romance.

**The murder mystery:** Johnson created a captivating set up with the murders in London, and brought it all to the countryside estate. She weaved the past into the present mystery with twists and turns that kept everyone guessing. Our characters faced danger keeping the suspense high even as we allowed time for this second chance romance to develop.

Copy provided by publisher. This review was originally posted on Caffeinated Book Reviewer

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## Story\_girl says

So so different from the usual historical romances and so very entertaining. I would highly recommend this to all historical romance fans.

Never thought I'd use the term action-packed to describe a HR book or come across ladies who excel at knife throwing and code decryption in HR. I'm pleasantly surprised and thoroughly entertained. Need to read the next book soon.

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## Erin Burns says

I received an ARC of this book from the Publisher, via Netgalley, this does not affect my opinion of this book or the content of my review.

I picked this up because I realized it was the same author who wrote A Christmas Dance, which I found

charming and day brightening. Plus, the blurb sounded pretty intriguing, and since it is the first book in the series it was a relief to not have to dig through a backlist. The issue with that, of course, is then you have to wait impatiently for the next one to come out.

This is a somewhat different story than *A Christmas Dance*, not just that it is a full length story, but the themes are a bit darker. But the same trick of creating likable characters and especially a strong, capable, and quirky heroine were here. There are two main prongs to the story. One is the mystery itself, and the second is the Big Misunderstanding between the main characters. But the misunderstanding is more one of intent and perspective than anything else. Lottie and Owen have themselves in a fine tangle of misunderstanding and hurt feelings, but it is difficult to blame them, it is a fraught situation. And it doesn't drag on either, they sit down and talk their way through most things approximately a quarter of the way into the story. Granted, it had dragged out 8 years prior to the start of the story, but since we as readers weren't dragged through it as well, I didn't find it bothersome. Which leaves the Big Secret, or rather Big Secrets. It is a twist alright.

I think this was really more Lottie's story than it was Owen's though. There was quite a bit of character growth for her. And a lot of heartache. Owen on the other hand, well, he was solid, and reliable. He was also on occasion, at least in his own head, somewhat ridiculous and kind of funny.

As for the plotting, the beginning and the ending were rather fast paced, but the middle dragged a bit. Sometimes it was frustrating and this is one of those books that I could put down for a bit and do other things and come back to it. While I do generally prefer that a book be gripping and that I can't put it down, by the end I kind of understood the point. This isn't one of those stories where the main characters hop into bed on a whim in a mad frenzy of lust. Despite their history, they got the chance to get to know each other as they are now. And that was lovely to see.

So my final verdict is to stick with it through the slog, and you'll end up with a delightful romance and plenty of payoff in the end. I'm looking forward to seeing what comes of the rest of the thief takers.

3.5 stars

<https://burnsthroughherbookshelf.word...>

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## **Andrea (Catsos Person) is a Compulsive eBook Hoarder says**

HRBC February 1-15, 2016 BOTM theme: Late Victorian

This is a perfectly respectable and end enjoyable book. It just doesn't have that extra something or oomph to make it a 4-5 star read.

However, this was a very good reading experience.

I like the law-enforcement angle of the series and I hope to read the second book in the series.

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## **Melliane says**

3.5/5

Mon avis en Français

My English review

I saw some great reviews about this novel and I confess that it made me curious. It must be said that the story puts forward many characters with a historical novel based on an intriguing mystery, all complemented by a little romance.

We discover Charlotte, a young woman who tried to rebuild her life and the one of her family after the death of her father, a famous thief. A death that could have cleared their names, (since her father died while trying to save a young woman), has only benefited to one man, Owen Renderwell, who received all the credit. While she greatly appreciated the policeman when he worked with her dad, the feelings evolved into anger and sadness of such an act. But now, a new murder takes Owen back to Charlotte to have more information on her father and so to discover the identity of the killer and his motives. Alas, the welcome she reserves him is quite cold but after so many years of hard feelings, the young woman is this time determined to help the detectives, if she does not subsequently falls in love again. But as the secrets are revealed, Lottie will understand that her father was not the man she thought he was and that he hurt more people than what she thought.

I appreciated to see the relationship between our two main characters evolve over the chapters. I was quickly swept away by the events at the beginning of the novel, but it is true that once passed half, I had a harder time hanging on to what was happening ... the pace of the plot became slower without a lot of event happening and I had a little trouble to go back in the story.

For the rest of the book, it's a pretty good story, and I was curious and surprised about the revelations of this family which we do not necessarily expect. The end was also quite nice and I was eager to find out why the family had been targeted this time.

It was a good story even though I expected a little more I have to admit. However, I am curious to see what will happen afterwards if we have one sequel.

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## **Anna's Herding Cats says**

Reviewed for herding cats & burning soup.

Amazon: <http://amzn.to/20KIAXA>

A man of the law and the criminal he fell in love with. Murder. Encrypted messages. Secret identities and danger. A chance to right past mistakes and maybe find love and forgiveness. A Talent for Trickery was full of so much yummy historical goodness!

Okay so real quick. These two have a past. Her daddy was a criminal and code master who made a deal with the law (Owen) to spare being prosecuted. But things went bad, he died during a case, and, well, Lottie is good on and pissed at Owen for his part in things. But now , 8 years later, there's a new case and it's led Owen and his men to her doorstep for help in breaking a code left by a murderer. He just might have brought more to her doorstep than they bargained for though when someone starts sneak attacking their group.

First, I couldn't resist this gorgeous cover! It pulled me right in and so did the characters. I had a lovely time slowly uncovering the past as Lottie and Owen set aside their broken trust in one another (and hurt feelings) in order to solve the murder. I really liked both of them and that while they could flub up or react on pure emotion they could also admit when they were wrong and apologize to each other. I love when characters actually act like adults. They weren't perfect along the way but they were solid.

The mystery of the codes they were trying to break was interesting. I liked seeing them work through her father's old notes and Lottie's mind work over the possibilities. And I enjoyed the danger as they tried to figure out who was attacking. If it was someone from their current lives or someone they'd wronged in the past that was out for revenge. There were moments that seriously had my palms sweating!

It's a slower moving read but one that kept my attention and has me very excited for the next book in the series. I can't wait to see what's in store for his friends and co-workers.

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## Flor says

3.5

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## Caz says

**I've given this a B+ at AAR, so 4.5 stars.**

**A Talent for Trickery** is Alissa Johnson's first new novel since 2012, and I, for one, have missed her. The books of hers I've read have been strongly characterised and intelligently written; she has an engaging, easy-to-read style that is laced with wit and subtle humour and the ability to develop her romances in a manner that never feels rushed or forced - and I'm happy to report that this latest book sees her in fine form.

Owen Renderwell, a Detective Inspector at Scotland Yard became the focus of public attention some eight years previously by virtue of the fact that he solved a high-profile case involving a kidnapped duchess and a fortune in diamonds. As a result, Owen was elevated to a viscountcy and his two friends and colleagues received knighthoods; and now the three of them work as private investigators. An inquiry into the recent murder of a brothel owner might not normally have come their way, but for two things: the murderer left a coded letter at the scene of the crime that was clearly intended to pique Owen's interest; and the victim had been a friend of the notorious criminal Will Walker, the man with whom Owen had secretly worked on a number of cases - including that of the missing duchess and diamonds.

Walker, an all-round blackguard, scoundrel and con-man worked with Owen for some four years before being killed attempting to rescue the Duchess of Strale. In order to protect his family - two daughters and a son - Owen arranged for them to disappear and assume new identities, but now, he has to seek them out for the first time since their father's death, knowing that he is the last person they are likely to want to see or trust.

"They" being - specifically - Lottie, Walker's eldest daughter and one-time accomplice. Fiercely loyal to her father, she blames Owen for his death and, more importantly, the fact that her father never received any recognition for his work on the right side of the law. Even though she knows, rationally, that keeping her father's name out of the limelight was the safest option for her and her siblings, she can't help feeling that Owen betrayed her and cheated her father out of any credit he may have been due for the fact that he had

changed his ways and was at last walking along the straight and narrow.

Throughout the four years of their association, Owen was strongly attracted to Lottie, but never made the slightest move in her direction because he didn't want to put her in a position where she felt she couldn't refuse him. His attempts to communicate with her following her father's death were unceremoniously rebuffed and he had to resign himself to never seeing her again, although in the eight years that followed, he has never been able to completely forget her.

But now he needs Lottie's help to decipher the encoded letter that was left at the scene of the murder, together with those that were left at a number of high-profile crime-scenes in London. Initially hostile, she can't refuse if her aid will see the murderer of her old family friend brought to justice, and an uneasy truce is struck between them.

Lottie's resentment of Owen is deep-seated and she is furious with herself when she is forced to acknowledge that the girlish infatuation she had harboured for him has never died – and worse, that she's as attracted to him as she ever was. She tries hard to maintain a frosty demeanour, but the more time she spends in his company, the more she remembers about old times while at the same time learning new things about the man he has become. Ms Johnson very wisely doesn't drag out the misunderstanding between the couple, and even though they can't completely agree, they have nonetheless come to a better understanding of the past well before the half-way point. Lottie is still keeping one devastating secret, and can't bear the thought of losing Owen again so soon after their reconciliation. But the sudden realisation that there is a killer on their trail leaves them no time to figure out what happens next, as they are plunged into a desperate fight survival against an unknown adversary.

Anyone who reads science-fiction or suspense novels on a regular basis will know what I mean when I describe the rest of this book as a kind of "base under siege" story, which is something I don't think I've come across in an historical romance before. For anyone unfamiliar with the term, it's basically a story in which the protagonists are somehow trapped in a particular location and facing a threat – known or unknown – either from the outside or within. I really enjoyed this aspect of the book; Owen and Lottie still have things to sort out between them, but don't let that get in the way of their working together to figure out the cipher and then to keep everyone safe; and the way their relationship is transformed throughout the course of the book is incredibly well-done. The balance between suspense and romance is just about right, and the author skilfully slips seamlessly between the two.

Both protagonists are three-dimensional, flawed characters whose interactions are enlivened by humour and a lovely undercurrent of affection and attraction, even during that initial period of hostility and mistrust. They have great chemistry and I loved their flirtatious, tender and sometimes combative interactions. Owen is a gorgeous hero – an honourable man who is nonetheless prepared to make sacrifices for the woman he has loved for so long; a man of action when he has to be, and a man accustomed to command in a way that is attractive rather than arrogant. Lottie is highly intelligent and devoted to her family, but is blinded by the deep love she held for the father who used her for his own ends. The secondary characters of Owen's colleagues and Lottie's siblings are well-rounded, with inner lives of their own, and I'm intrigued at the prospect of Esther – whose revelations late on in the story are most unexpected – and Sir Samuel as a future couple in another book in the series.

**A Talent for Trickery** is the sort of book that leaves one with a smile on one's face and a feeling of real satisfaction after it's finished. It's not flashy or gimmicky; it's just a very well-told story peopled with characters whose flaws make them easy to identify with and like and I'm happy to recommend it. Welcome back, Ms Johnson – and please don't make me wait another three years for your next book!

## Dianne says

Can the remaining member of a father-daughter team of professional thieves leave their sins behind and start over undetected as a law abiding citizens? A once famous Scotland Yard detective became a force to be reckoned with the aide of the father, thief turned informant, but that was years ago. The father is gone and it is his records and journals that bring Private Investigator Owen Renderwell to Lottie's door. Inside those journals could hold clues to recent robberies and a grizzly death. Will Lottie hand them over to the man who was once a the embodiment of her worst nightmare but now makes her life and emotions come alive? Will his intrusion into her new life expose her secrets to a man bent on her destruction? What about the danger to her family?

Lottie is intriguing, strong and never fails to challenge Owen and he likes it. There are crimes to be solved and their prickly relationship could be perfect, except he was the law and she was the criminal.

**A Talent for Trickery** by Alissa Johnson is a journey back into the world of Victorian London, complete with all of the atmosphere and grace. Her characters are formidable, the plot twisted and the romance adds more depth to her tale. There is a mystery, some suspense and a killer waiting in the shadows. Not a fast-paced tale, the dialogue is very proper and one can visualize each scene, the family dynamics and the tension that threads throughout. A bit slow moving at times, but one definitely knows they aren't in Kansas anymore.

I received an ARC edition from Sourcebooks Casablanca in exchange for my honest review.

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## Mei says

This is the first book I've read by this author and I must say that is good, not fantastic, but really good.

I like most the way the characters, both main and secondary, are described.

Both Owen and Lottie are complex characters with their own flaws. Owen is commandeering and arrogant in his convictions, but also ready to listen to Lottie when her expertise is needed. Lottie is at the same time very sure and unsecure of herself.

Both their lives have not been easy, but Lottie's was even less so IMHO. Her father was a con artist and

criminal to the bone who manipulated both his daughters shamelessly, which left Lottie with deep scars about the value of honesty and honor. She overanalyzes and double check everything, always pondering of what is correct and just.

While Owen appreciates these qualities, he's unaware of the fact that Lottie is deeply ashamed of her action while working with her father in the past. But, at the same time, he's always been attracted to her and is ready to help her heal.

I loved their interaction and their growing closeness. Once the why Lottie shunned Owen is clarified, they work together very well. The way each one of them teases and goad the other is very, very well done here.

The humor is cleverly done and I loved these moments too.

The only thing that I didn't like is the somewhat loss of action in the middle of the book. There the things got a little too slow for my taste, but I understand that this is not an action driven story. So, if you like a very good slow moving story, with clever humor and clever MCs, than this book is perfect for you!

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