



The Princess in the Opal Mask

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Every Fairy-Tale Ending Has a Price . . .

Orphaned as a child in the crumbling village of Tulan, Elara is determined to learn her true identity, even if it means wielding a dagger. Meanwhile, in Galandria's royal capital, Princess Wilha stands out as someone to either worship or fear. Though no one knows why the king has always made her conceal her face—including Wilha herself.

When an assassination attempt threatens the peace of neighboring kingdoms, Elara and Wilha are brought face to face . . . with a chance at claiming new identities. However, with dark revelations now surfacing, both girls will need to decide if brighter futures are worth the binding risks.

The Princess in the Opal Mask Details

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Author : Jenny Lundquist

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From Reader Review The Princess in the Opal Mask for online ebook

The Captain says

Ahoy there me mateys! I have no idea where I first heard about this book but it sounded like a prince and pauper type story so it went onto the ports fer plunder list. I love those types of fairy tales and was excited to pick this one up. It turned out to be a fun romp that I read in one night.

There are two girls who eventually do switch places. The highlight of this book for me was Elara. She is feisty and determined. I particularly liked the way in which she interacted with her foster family in the beginning of the novel. The other girl, Princess Wilha, had her best moments in the second half of the book but overall seemed bland in comparison to Elara.

While this book was fast-paced, it does have lesser elements. Two in particular were the romances and the plot problems. The romances were mostly surface and not really developed in depth. I liked the guys involved. I just wish they didn't feel so two dimensional. The plot was also clumsy. The reason for the princess wearing the mask seemed farfetched. A lot of the events seemed disjointed. So many improbable things just fall into place. Both main characters make odd choices that just seem to move the plot along. I would have liked a little more depth to the characters' motivations. I also wish there had been more about the relationship between the two girls. Though I did not expect that ending at all which was fun.

Despite the flaws, I enjoyed it enough to read the sequel.

Check out me other reviews at <https://thecaptainsquartersblog.wordpress.com>...

Kate Willis says

[This book a) had a swoony cover and b) was lauded as a Gail Carson Levine-like middle-grade fairytale. The concept looked super cool as well, so I brought this book (and its sequel) home with a pretty good feeling.

cries I wante

Hannah (The Curiouser & Curiouser) says

I won this book through Goodreads First Reads giveaway. In no way has this influenced my rating or opinion of this book.

Okay, first thing: THIS DOES NOT REVOLVE AROUND WHICH GIRL GETS PRINCE CHARMING OR ANYTHING OF THAT NATURE.

I know, right?

Now, there is a prince in this novel . . . though I'm not sure if you could call him charming. And there are other guys around, but this isn't one of those YA fairytale novels where the girls fight over prince charming.

So Elara and Wilha are complete opposites. Where Elara can manipulate and tough through situations, Wilha hides behind her mask and is meek and kind of always frightened. But don't worry, dear readers who want a kick butt heroine, Wilha changes pretty quickly and does some rash and unexpected things of her own.

Something I really loved about both girls: At one point or another, both of them discover that the guys they like (at the time) aren't going to be with them, but neither of the girls do that annoying teenage girl thing where they mope around for the next one hundred pages of the book about how unfair life is.

YES.

FINALLY.

Now, I'm not usually interested in the princess and prince thing in YA books, but I quite liked this one. Elara and Wilha are very likeable and both do rash and unexpected things at some point or another.

This book is just something new, to be honest.

If you like the whole mystical kingdom and secrets of the royal family kind of books, this one is for you. However, realize that this isn't your normal prince charming kind of book. The prince? He's not that nice at first, and Elara gives it to him straight. There was one scene where I really hated the guy, but he made up for it by the end of the book.

Oh, and the end? I thought I knew where each girl was going to end up. I thought this was one of those books where both girls were going to do "the right thing" and "go back where they belonged" like I've seen in so many other novels. But they didn't. They did what they wanted, not what was expected of them, and I loved that. Honestly that was probably the highlight of the book for me.

Review can also be found here, where I also blog and fangirl about books:
<http://obsessivereads.wordpress.com/>

Meaghan says

I won this book as part of the Good Reads giveaways. This page turning story had me on the edge of my seat, waiting to see what would happen to the two main characters. A story swept up into the medieval world of Princesses and Princes, deceit, and a curse, there was romance, complicated relationships, hidden pasts, and tons of secrets. The mystery unraveled itself quite nicely, and left me eager for the next installment of Jenny Lundquist's next book. I will definitely keep this series on my watch list to read in the future, and so should you!

Jill Williamson says

Picked up this book on the recommendation of a friend and was so pleasantly surprised to find that I couldn't put it down! Read it in two days. I liked both girls a great deal and wanted to find out how they were connected. Thrilled to find that book two is already out. I'm buying it now. I'm also excited to find another author who writes entertaining books I can let my thirteen-year-old read. My daughter will eat up this story.

Nicole says

I am on some sort of a fantasy kick right now. I don't usually do fantasy. I have problems with name pronunciation and feeling like I can't get my footing in this strange world. That wasn't as hard here. In this book, it was all about princesses and I can completely understand princesses. I really enjoyed getting into this book. I fell in love with this cover when I first saw it so getting it at ALA was a treat.

So this book...I really enjoyed the story and the Parent Trap type plot, but I was often frustrated by pausing to sound out some names. Not a big deal, but it is one of the biggest reasons that I avoid fantasy. Once I was able to get past the names, I found myself wanting to pull the book out constantly. I wanted to see what decisions that Wilha and Elara were going to make and how this was going to impact their lives.

I liked that they twins weren't too opposite, and that they had some similarities. I want to say that their main differences were that they had different upbringings and that made one of hard and indifferent and the other one a weak woman who needed to find who she was. I actually liked how they slowly discovered who they were meant to be.

As I learned about Wilha, I couldn't imagine what it would be like wearing a mask all day. I would understand why she was so submissive after having been forced to wear the mask her whole life not knowing if it was because she was cursed or just very very ugly. I think I would have had the same reaction that Elara did to it.

I really enjoyed this book and the background story of with the Opals, and I cannot wait to see what the next book holds. When I initially picked this book up at ALA13, I was intrigued by the plot and the cover, but I was under the impression that this book was simply a stand alone, but finding out that it is part of a series, at the very least, a two book series is wonderful.

Be sure to stop by later today to check out my interview with the author!

mandy says

Just to get this out of the way: if what you want is a romance, with perhaps some sisterly competition of who-gets-the-prince, complete with your whole hair-pulling and mud-slinging routine, then **walk away from this book.**

I suppose that's one of the good things about *The Princess in the Opal Mask*; it could've gone down a catty, rage-inducing route, but it steered clear of it. The relationship between Wilha and Elara, albeit a little hostile from one side and understandably cold, was not a product of sibling rivalry or boy drama. **Both characters**

had their distinct personalities, their own aspirations and expectations out of life, and of course, their own disappointments.

Wilha and Elara could not be any more different from each other, which different upbringing tends to do to people. This accounts for a lot of Elara's flaws: her hostility, resentment, and downright bitterness towards the world at large. In this aspect **she was not a character I can find myself attached to**. Like Cinderella, she was brought up by an "evil step-mother" and -- in Elara's case -- one step-sister. *Unlike Disney's Cinderella*, though, Elara has a bit of a "bite". She talks back. She's sly. While these are not the problems I had with her, combined with her overall attitude, she was not a character to be "sympathized" for or pitied.

That could be a good or bad thing I admit, but on my part, it proved the latter.

All the things I've mentioned above could've warranted three stars from me. But unfortunately my review doesn't end there. While I did not expect an adult-grade fantasy novel, starting this book I *did* expect it to be targeted towards a more Young-Adult category. However, this feels a lot more Middle-Grade than anything. That in itself is not a problem, but **the dumbing down** -- whether intentional or not -- certainly was.

1. Originality

Twins separated at birth, a girl with unknown parentage who turns out to be a princess these are tropes used far too often and far too casually in far too many fantasy novels out there.

Add to the boiling cauldron a mixture of Evil Step-Mother, Sheltered Princess, and Kingdoms at the Brink of War ... why, do you *really* need to read the book to figure out what happens?

2. Predictability

Certainly I did not find one single plot point that I didn't already foresee. The Princess falling for a commoner? The Twin falling for the Prince? and later taking the Princess' place?

This is as Middle Grade as it can get. The only way you can truly enjoy this as a five-star read is if you haven't read too many novels before, or can ignore story lines that have been used and re-used from the dawn of mankind.

I could definitely find more to criticize, but to give credit where it's due, the book *did* pick up towards the last quarter or so. While at first I did not sympathize nor particularly *like* Elara, I did grow to tolerate her and in the end gave her flaws a pass.

Wilha also grew as a character -- I think **in the aspect of character growth, this book shows promise** and I am sure many others will find more enjoyment in this novel than I did.

you can also read more reviews at my blog >>click click<<

Pamela says

Hi there! Life got you down? What you need is the equivalent of a fluffy bathrobe and bubble bath: The Princess in the Opal Mask by Jenny Lundquist. This was a marvelously enjoyable read that just made me feel happy. Like a room without a roof. Whatever that means. You like ... getting wet? Getting sunburned? Bird poop?

ANYWAY.

As an orphan, Elara's life is pretty miserable. Note to self: do not become an orphan if living in 19th century Dickensian London OR in any fantasy world ever. Okay, yeah, the benefits in the end generally are pretty sweet (discovery by prince, Chosen One Archetype, beneficent rich person), but everything before that? No thanks. Her adoptive parents have taken her in solely for the money they receive from the government for her upkeep. We all know where that money goes: straight into clothing and fripperies for their biological daughter. Well, at least Elara's got one friend, Cordon, and he's promised her something very dear. He also turns out to be, well. I'll keep it clean.

On the other side of the kingdom, in the capitol city of Galandria, the people are getting ready to celebrate the birthday of the Masked Princess, Wilha. Rumor has it that she wears the half mask because looks can kill--literally. Or some other such horrid rumor. When she looks at herself in the mirror, Wilha sees a rather normal looking girl. Two eyes, a nose, a mouth, hair. The usual suspects. Nothing odd. But per the King, her father, she must be masked whenever anyone looks upon her.

With some finagling and excellent acting, Elara manages to get tickets to the Princess' party in Galandria from the social worker who comes to check up on her. Wait, on second thought, how did he have just the right amount of tickets? And why would he have tickets? And why did the armed guard take away Elara's teacher, just after he gave her a book from her mother and a warning?

By now you've probably guessed what's going on, especially if you've read The Man in the Iron Mask. Elara and Wilha are twins, separated at birth by their father, who puts far too much faith in superstition and allows fear to conquer any natural love he has for his children. Wilha, being the eldest, was named princess, while Elara was left nameless and sent away to the countryside. Why all the hubbub, you may ask?

Well, this kingdom hasn't had a great history of twins in power. Let's just leave it at that.

After an assassination attempt and the wounding of the King, the royal advisors capture Elara and reveal her true parentage. The King, who is clearly gunning for the Evil Father of the Year Award here, recently betrothed Wilha to Prince Stefan of Kyrenica. Kyrenica is both a neighbor and an enemy, having been founded by a renegade Galandrian Princess some time ago. Wilha believes that she is nothing, or less than nothing. She believes the lines that she is fed about being dangerous and weak and useless. She accepts the mask without questioning, and despite a bit of a rebellious thought, resigns herself to life in the enemy's domain, married to a man she does not know.

With the royal family seemingly under attack by foes unknown (although the King's advisers clearly wish with all their black and shriveled little hearts that it's the *Evil Neighbors*), the Men in Power (because women can't make decisions, obviously--a procedure that Elara takes on with gusto) decide to ship Wilha off to her intended ASAP. To protect her, they'll use the disposable princess, Elara, as a decoy.

All of this happens relatively early on in the book. I would say the whole second half is dedicated to the princesses' intrigues in Korinth, the Kyrenican capitol. This is where a boatload of character development happens, and it's fascinating. Elara and Wilha face off more than once, and it's really fun. I didn't really love

the plotline involving Stefan, but it's not awful. I'm curious to see if the next book focuses on Wilha's further development into her own person.

All in all, fluffy and fun.

Kara says

My Comments

Every Fairy-Tale Ending Has a Price. . . . I love this description and it fits this story SOOO well! What would you do if you found out your whole life was a lie? Elara has been raised by a foster family who has mistreated her and called her worthless every day. Other words they have used to describe her are unwanted. unlovable. hideous. However, Elara is a survivor and is constantly finding ways to take walks and find her own adventures. Little does she know that everything she has endured is about to change forever.

Wilha is the Masked Princess. Even her father has never seen her face and there are several rumors around the kingdom to explain this. The Masked Princess, according to the people, is both a curse and a blessing. Most people fear her thinking that if they accidentally see her face they will be cursed and die. Others believe that one word from her will heal the sick and the ailing. She has no idea why, but she is always obedient, always wearing the mask and performing her duties as the princess of the kingdom. There are so many questions in her heart, but she isn't allowed to speak freely to anyone. She longs for romance from Patric, the man who is training her to sword fight, and she confesses her strange dreams to her guardian, Lord Murcendor. Wilha will also learn that there are traitors in her midst.

One day Elara finds out that things have changed between her and her best friend, Cordon. In her attempt to run away and follow the crowd, an assassination attempt is made on the royal family and the next thing Elara knows, she must make a decision that will change her destiny and the destiny of Princess Wilha.

The title of this book and the plot strongly reminded me of the movie, The Man in the Iron Mask. I think it's PG-13, but it's a musketeer movie with a corrupt king who has a secret twin brother that his parents didn't know about. Leonardo DiCaprio plays both brothers. It's not a kid's movie, but a great story.

There are two things I can say about this book with certainty, there is NOTHING typical about this princess story and there is NO way to predict what will happen next. My one hope for this story didn't happen (I reallllly wanted the two girls to become a family and work together against the bad guys), but alas everything does work out beautifully despite this one point not happening. The two girls do help one another indirectly for the sake of peace in both kingdoms, but they do so separately as they each find what path they should take for themselves.

How do I say this without giving anything away? Princess Wilha's mom has passed away, but I truly disagree with how her parents handled the situation. King Fennrick is absent from most of the plot and even though he does his best by Princess Wilha, he has very little involvement in what goes on. Wilha and Elara have no family protection, no security, and they are being lied to. That's the part of the story I had the most trouble with. However, the way it's written, I understand why this happens. Throughout the book, both girls are in danger and must figure out who they can trust along the way. Halfway through the book, I realized that the opposing kingdom was not the real enemy and was glad how things turned out with them.

I didn't fully understand the reason for the mask until the end of the book. Either the king was really negligent with his family or he trusted the wrong men as his advisors and guardians while they created division in his kingdom. Either way, the mask creates a prison of its own while Wilha dutifully wears it. It doesn't just block her perspective/view, it causes distance so that she can never really get close to anyone. In a way, this mask does help the kingdom and bring mystery to the princess, but it's not worth the cost.

Elara is conflicted throughout most of the book once she agrees to the bargain she is offered, but I kept hoping she would change her mind because she does SUCH a great job on her part. I was VERY satisfied with what she chooses. It was awesome how both girls find their way on THEIR terms. I was also amazed by their hearts. No matter how they have been wronged, their ultimate motive is to bring peace to the land and avoid the two kingdoms going to war. They both take large risks to achieve this goal.

I absolutely love the cover of this book and it's a great story overall. This book is in 3 parts and is told by both Elara and Wilha's perspective. I think book lovers that enjoy mystery, intrigue, betrayal, families with secrets, royalty, romance, and feisty characters will really enjoy this book. Neither girl ends up with the guy she hoped for, but I truly believe they get a much better ending than either one could anticipate and they both decide to leave a better legacy than they were left with. That's what a dangerous adventure will do, it gives you the choice of finding a better destiny and of leaving behind the place you thought would be your only home.

I want to thank Jenny Lundquist for posting on facebook the chance to review this book. I also want to thank Running Press/Teens Edition for sending me the review copy. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. Also, I really wanted a beautiful mask to wear after reading this!

Monica says

I found this novel to be very engaging. It had some surprising elements to the plot even though the underlying themes of the book were fairytale cliches (unknown parents, hidden identities, twins who switch places, ect.) I found it interesting that the novel took place in a fantasy setting, but did not contain any other fantastical elements. It is set in a world without magic, but the fairytale tone of the novel and Lundquist's writing made the reader feel as if she was reading a traditional fantasy novel.

The two POV characters could be frustrating and immature at times, but they both grow throughout the novel. I did not like the main secondary character, and I would have enjoyed the story a bit more if Lundquist had made him a bit more of a sympathetic character from the start (He is originally an antagonist, but by the end of the book becomes one of the POV's love interests despite little growth as a character).

Overall, I enjoyed the novel, and it to be a fun and fast paced story. I will definitely be reading the second novel in the series when it becomes available.

Books are TARDIS says

[Wilha finding a room for rent and a job that easily. Elara being in the prison cell right next to Lord Finley's man etc. (hide spoiler)]

Whitley Birks says

Read more reviews on my blog

I'd give Elara's part of this book five stars, Wilhamina's part three stars, and so the average comes out to four stars. The book was easy to get sucked into, in part thanks to the invisible and smooth writing, and I found myself eagerly reading it long past the point where I should have gone to bed. But as much as I enjoyed the plot overall, Wilha...just really didn't do it for me. I read her parts the fastest just because I wanted to get through them.

Though I wouldn't call anything in this book original, it's still told well enough that if you enjoy low-fantasy novels, you'll probably enjoy this one. It's a solid offering and has all the things I love most: princesses, politics, and rebellions. I seriously do not care how many times I read about that as long as each offering is quality. I loved the history and the superstition that set up the plot of this book, I loved the arranged marriage angle, I loved the machinations, I loved all of that.

And I really loved Elara. She was tough and resourceful and determined, but at the same time her story was heartbreaking. There was a moment halfway through the book where Wilha tried to make nice with her, and you can kind of see the relationship they could have had, but Elara's bitterness (as a result of her upbringing) get in the way. I almost wanted to cry for her, because the bad hand she's been dealt meant she lost out on this great potential relationship. But at the same time, as a reader, I'm really glad the book didn't smooth that over or make it too angsty. She walked a fine line there as a hardass character, and she did it well.

Wilha, on the other hand, was such a doormat. At first I didn't care, because her characterization made sense and I was hoping to see her grow from that point. But she...didn't. Instead, halfway through the novel, she just started doing stuff without rhyme or reason, for no point I could see besides moving the plot along. She simply didn't have enough of a personality to provide a motivation for all the things she did, so she ended up feeling more like an authorial puppet than a complete character. She had potential, really, but it just...wasn't handled well.

Even by the end of the book, Elara saved the day in every conceivable way, and Wilha...eh, she was there. But I did like the ending. It wrapped up the story enough to feel like a complete novel, but left enough loose ends to keep me interested in the sequel. (Which I will certainly be looking forward to.)

claridge | booknomnom says

The Princess in the Opal Mask is the first book of 2014 that have me filled with so much anticipation. This book thrums with potential and every page esnakes the reader with the perfect blend of mystery and mystique. (And what an apt adjective that is. Mystique.)

The Princess in the Opal Mask is about an orphan placed in the care of an abusive foster family in the fictional town of Tulan, in the southwestern portion of the Galandrian country. At first, it had the make up of yet another Cinderella story set in yet another period piece. The problem with this type of story is it loses its magic right after the few initial chapters, and succumbs to a downward pull in the story line. And I don't

blame gravity for those failures.

If one is observant enough, there are enough clues in the beginning to arouse suspicion and it is there where the story deviates from the rest of the Cinderella-wannabe's.

To be honest, one of the strongest points this story has to offer is the politics behind the court. It has always been a weakness of mine, reading historical stories of the English and Spanish courts, and what always sinks me is the intricate yet elegant world of court politics. The Princess in the Opal Mask simmers with all these diplomatic pretenses, and the very fact that the story happened thru one of their kingdom's biggest deceit really, really intrigues me.

The world building is also spectacular. This is one of those books which proves that it doesn't have to be so elaborate. There is complexity in the simplicity of a world that is strong in its foundations. This one really stuck with its foundations. Because really, what most fantasy writers don't realize is that not everyone can sustain a stamina to build a world similar to the Wizarding World. People, keep it simple. If it grows, then make sure the roots are strong. Do not force the branches to grow out of the budding plant. Let it take root.

The romance part of this story - and here I will degenerate into a simpering fangirl - is really sweet. Although it is a little predictable. I am hoping that both Stefan and Elara grow into more complex characters individually and as a couple.

Speaking of growing into more complex characters, I really love the slow character development of the twins. They've both wanted things that are not presented to them by circumstances, and at the end, the one horrible thing became the chance that they were seeking. It is kind of cheap shot - I mean, it is still considered escaping. But right now, at this point in the story, I will reserve my judgement. I just hope that whatever is in store for the following books is enough to encompass a change that will span their whole realm. Because what happened in this world is just the spark. And that spark has a huge potential for change. Gears are already turning. I just hope that the books sustains its initial velocity.

I keep on watching out for the magical turn of events, but so far none of the Deus ex machina types have jumped off and derailed the story. I really, really hope that whatever mystical explanation - if there would be - would not cause this story's descent.

I just have so much hope for this book! It's been so long since I've read a fantasy book that has a refreshing take on things. (After The Girl with Fire and Thorns by Rae Carson, which incidentally is what comes to my mind when I was reading this. Maybe because they're both such wonderfully written, and written in almost the same tone.)

Alyssa says

Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog

The Princess in the Opal Mask by Jenny Lundquist
Book One of The Princess in the Opal Mask series
Publisher: Running Press Kids
Publication Date: October 22, 2013
Rating: 4 stars

Source: Review copy sent by the publisher

Official Summary:

One Legend Determines the Fate of Two Lives

In the faraway village of Tulan, sixteen-year-old Elara has spent her entire life as a servant, trying to track down her real name. The name she was given before being orphaned. Meanwhile, in the kingdom of Galandria, Princess Wilhamina does not know why her father, the king, makes her wear a mask. Or why she is forbidden to ever show her face.

When a new peace treaty between Galandria and Kyrenica is threatened, Elara and Wilha are brought face to face. Told in alternating perspectives, this intricate fairytale pulls both girls toward secrets that have been locked away behind castle doors, while the fate of two opposing kingdoms rests squarely on their untrained shoulders.

What I Liked:

Oh, how I enjoyed this book! I hoped I would, because I like "high"/"epic" fantasy novels - it's one of my favorite genres. My expectations for this book weren't particularly high, but it was still really nice to be surprised. I'm so glad I got the chance to read this book! And to be on the tour.

This book is written in split point of views. Elara is the first of the two girls to be introduced, and then Wilha. Elara is a poor girl who lives on the mercy of a cruel woman and her family. The woman's husband is a drunk and a pushover - he lets his wife walk all over him. The woman is rude and disgusting and horrible to Elara, and only lets her live with them because of the money that the orphanage gives them, to take care of Elara.

The daughter, Serena, is the worst, in my opinion. She is snobby and selfish, and while she acts like she cares about Elara's welfare, she totally doesn't. Not to mention that she spirited away Elara's one best friend (Cordon), and the two of them (Cordon and Serena) decide to get married, when Cordon promised to marry Elara.

Yes, it might have been when they were children, but a promise is a promise, no matter what. In my culture, if you say you're going to do something, you had better do it, no excuses.

But anyway. The beginning was slow, because it was all about introducing Elara's life, and then introducing Wilha's life. Wilha is a bit spoiled, even though she suffers because she constantly has to wear a mask. Everyone thinks that she is cursed. But Wilha is such a puppet. She does whatever her family wants her to do, and doesn't fight back. She doesn't use her power, or fight for what she wants. Yet she is selfish, because she wouldn't have it any other way.

So, that's part one, and how I feel about part one. Part two deals with the two girls going to the land of Wilha's future husband. I'm not going to say more specifically, but I think you can guess the relationship between Wilha and Elara, and why they are both going to the kingdom. I knew right from reading the synopsis, who they were to each other.

The plot is AWESOME. It's very unique, considering most "high"/"epic" fantasy plots. It's focused around the mystery of the mask, of the two girls, and an impending war. In most fantasy novels, a war is a huge part

of the overall plot of the series. I think we'll see more of that in book two.

Elara is my favorite of the two girls. She is assertive and controlled, deceptive yet soft. She and her new love interest (take that, Cordon) are the CUTEST. I really hope everything works out for the two of them, because I LOVE the two of them together.

I feel like Wilha was a terrible character - I just didn't like her. I could totally see things from her perspective, but that doesn't mean that I have to like her. See more about Wilha and her character development in the next section.

Love triangles... not really. I could see there being one in the future for Wilha, but I could care less. I really hope that Elara and her love interest stay together. **KEEP THEM TOGETHER, MS. LUNDQUIST!**

I liked this book.

What I Did Not Like:

I thought that the first part of the book was a bit slow. I'm good with slow - I can deal with it - but it still bothers me, when I'm trying to figure out what exactly is going on, and what should be happening. We're introduced to Elara's life first, and then Wilha's life.

In all honesty, the way the author constructed the story - with Elara being introduced first, and Elara being the poor girl, I sort of disliked Wilha. She is definitely too spoiled and puppet-like, beginning and end. In my opinion, her character development is extremely. Even at the end, she is selfish. She tries to tell herself that her entire life, she hasn't been selfish, but, um, she totally has been selfish.

I just don't like her. Elara and I are much more compatible - she's got more verve and spunk and a tiny bit of a temper, I suppose. But it's okay - I can live with Wilha in the story.

Would I Recommend It:

I most certainly would! I haven't read too many fantasy novels this year - "high"/"epic" fantasy - but this one is a great read! I was totally drawn in by the interesting situation with the masks, the two girls situation, and so on. I didn't think I would like this one as much as I did, but, I did!

Rating:

4 stars. An excellent Young Adult fantasy read! I'm so glad I got a chance to read it. Even if you aren't a fan of fantasy, **DEFINITELY** check out this book! It's a refreshing and intriguing start to a spellbinding series!

Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says

The stares are agony. People look at me, not as someone they may wish to know, but as a macabre curiosity, a freak that both intrigues and repulses them. Men hold their children tighter, fearing that the rumors may be true, and I have the power to harm their family. Beautiful women glare at me, feeling upstaged by the grandeur of my jewels and dress. The peasants worship or revile me, calling out their well wishes or ill will in equal measures.

None of them want to look past the Masked Princess's costume and see the girl underneath.

Recommended for fans of Gail Carson Levine. This was a sweet little read, it feels more middle-grade than YA, despite the romance and the ages of the characters involved.

We have a princess and a pauper. There is nothing terribly original about this book, but it has well-written characters of different personalities to whom younger girls will be able to relate. They're rather tropey for the genre, but I have no complaints. For the most part, I enjoyed the main characters in this book, and the writing did a fantastic job of evocating the girls' emotions and very distinct dispositions. The weakness in this book lies in the main plot and the many dangling loose ends. I am not referring to a cliffhanger, I'm referring to the fact that people whom I felt are significant appear in the book, never to be seen again.

Summary: The book is narrated alternately by Wilha and Elara, in first-person POV.

Elara is an orphan girl. She has never known a home other than that of her cruel foster family; she has to deal with a somewhat-wicked foster sister, a cruel, insulting foster mom, and an indifferent foster father who spends much of his time either drunk or else drunk in a gambling house. She is street-smart, she is well-educated, determined to wrangle every bit of education from her stingy foster family as she can get. She is spirited, and she is self-sufficient, learning at an early age that life is going to be crappire unless she stands up for herself. She is bitter, with good reasons.

Princess Wilhamina (Wilha) is the epitome of a spoiled little rich girl, also with good reasons. Her mother died when she was young, leaving a grief-stricken father who is determined that no one shall ever see his daughter's face. She is to wear a mask at all time. There has nary been a single soul who has seen her face, and the one servant who has seen her has mysteriously disappeared from her service. As such, there is an air of mystery around her existence. There is a cult surrounding Wilha and her mask. There are whispers everywhere Wilha goes. She is feared. She is reviled. She is worshipped.

But really, Wilha is just a sad, lonely girl, without a single friend, whose very own servants think poorly of her, whose brother cares nothing for her existence, **whose father doesn't even want to look upon her face.**

I am left alone with the sinking fear that has been my constant companion.

Because if my own father refuses to look at me, there must be something horribly wrong with me.

Wilha is about to make an very much unwanted marriage to the heir of a rival country, Prince Stefan of Kyrenica. Elara has just been captured by the King's guards. They are about to meet. How are the two girls connected?

And then Lord Murcendor begins to tell me a tale so unbelievable, I have no doubt it is true.

Setting & Plot: Nothing groundbreaking. It is a standard middle grade fantasy without magic. I liked the background given on the history of Galandria. I liked the growing display of prejudice and hate between Galandria and Kyrenica. It was always evident that the countries were on the edge of a very tenuous peace, and the conflict between the country's peoples and their hatred and prejudice among each other were gradually shown throughout the book. Each of the citizens of one country have unbased prejudice against the others, thinking of them as little better than uncivilized savages, dogs, and murderers.

The plot itself, as well as the progression left a lot to be desired. There were a lot of very coincidental events leading to the discovery of information that I felt was too accidental to be true. It is not a good plot device to

have crucial plans overheard by the same person repeatedly. **I make a lot of concessions for the fact that this is a middle grade novel, but even for this genre, it should not be assumed that the reader is stupid.**

The plot seemed too hurried in parts, and just unbelievable in others. There were plot lines that were never followed through, and as I mentioned earlier, people just disappeared from the book whom I thought were going to play a bigger role. There were rather insignificant loose ends, but they bothered me, mainly because this book is geared towards a younger audience, it should be simple, it should be uncomplicated, and it should not leave dangling strings of plots. I have different standards for different genres, ok?

I know this is the first in a series, but it doesn't excuse the fact that the book feels incomplete.

The Characters: By far, Elara is the best thing about this book. **Elara is the kind of heroine I have always loved in my middle grade fantasies, and she completely delivered this book for me.** She is not a wilting flower. She is strong, neither obstinate nor stubborn. Her acts of defiance are sneaky, rather than outrageous. She just wants to live a normal life, she doesn't give two cents about power or money.

“Would you?” he asks. “If the opal crown was being offered to you?”

“I would have refused him,” I say. “Galandria has done nothing for me. Let someone else rule this wretched kingdom.”

She is bitter, it's true, and it is completely forgivable. Elara has had a crap life, and I do not begrudge Elara her frustration and anger at the life she has been forced to live. Elara is also understandably angry about what she is forced to do, she is unwilling to participate in a deceit involving Wilha, a girl she sees as weak, spoiled, and spineless. But Elara is a survivor, and she will do what she needs to do to live another day. And she does it so well.

Elara is just so freaking awesome. I loved her wit, I love her intelligence, her ability to blend in and to make the best of a bad situation. Elara is never perfect, but she makes do with what she's been given, as always.

I had a much harder time sympathizing with Wilha. Elara sees the princess Wilha as weak, and I rather agree. Wilha is scared, shy, and the opposite of the outspoken Elara. Elara berates her so many times, and I found myself nodding in agreement. **I loved this scene, where Elara lays the smack down on the weak Wilha for her inability to see herself as anything but a victim.**

You cannot know what it was like, being forced to wear the mask.”

“Forced?” A sardonic smile twists at her lips. “So they held you down and strapped the mask to your face every day, is that it?”

“Well, no,” I say, frowning, “But—”

“Did they starve you? Threaten to throw you in the dungeon? Lock you in your chambers?”

“No, of course not. But there were so many rumors. Of my ugliness. Of a curse. Even some people in the palace believed them.”

“Some people are idiots,” [Elara] snaps. “So what? You’re not blind, and you own a mirror. Obviously you must have known there was nothing wrong with your face.”

And to further add to my dislike, at the first chance she's got, she completely ditches Elara and throws her to the wolves.

The Romance: DANGLING PLOT STRINGS. It's not so much a love triangle here, because random people just freaking (I'm doing so good in not using profanity in this review. Must. Not. Stop. Now.) disappear off the place of the earth. The romance was sweet, but it was like...what happened to the other guys? Yeah, I

know I'm vague, but it can't be helped if I don't want to insert spoilers. This book's plot just frustrated me so much.

There is kissing, but the romance in this book is quite sweet and very appropriate for a teenaged audience. There is no insta-love. Relationships take time to grow. It is really, really sweet at times.

Of all the words in this world, love is the most powerful of them all. It's a word I can't say. Not yet, anyway.

Not until I know it comes from the deepest, most sincere place in my heart.

Overall: Not on the same par as other fantasy middle grade novels, but still highly enjoyable.
