



A Raven's Heart

K.C. Bateman

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In the war against France, Heloise Hampden is a high-value asset to the Crown. She's cracked the enemy's most recent communication, and for that, someone is trying to kill her. However, it's the agent assigned to protect Heloise who poses the greatest threat to her heart: William de l'Isle, Viscount Ravenwood. Heloise has quarreled with the man they call Raven since childhood, yet always maintained a chaste distance. She's sure nothing will change, thanks to the disfiguring scar on her face. So why is she so enchanted by the sight of Raven's jet-black hair, rakish smile, and wicked green eyes?

Nothing has changed. Raven still wonders how Hell-cat Hampden's lithe body would feel pressed against his, but for the mission he must remind himself that the woman takes more pleasure in ancient languages than she does in seduction. His imprisonment six years ago broke him in a way that makes the prospect of love impossible. Still, his heart beats like mad whenever he's within ten paces of Heloise, and he'll do whatever it takes to keep her safe—even if that means taking her to Spain as an unwilling hostage. Protecting her from danger will be a challenge; protecting her from desire will be pure agony.

A Raven's Heart Details

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From Reader Review A Raven's Heart for online ebook

Ingrid Thomas says

5 out of 5 witty stars

This is a comedic romance story with a great set of characters!!! You love them right from the beginning!!!

“That’s how it is with me. When you go, all the light goes, too.” He sounded both defiant and vulnerable.

Heloise is just at the right age where the marriage proposals come from every angle, and even after she was in an accident that left her with a scared face, the marriage proposals still came, and her father was pushing her to pick someone, so she would be properly wedded. Except... she did not want to get married just because, she wanted love, and adventure, and more than what she was seeing as her future.

She is a bright and very intelligent girl, with a job: helping in the war by decoding messages! But above all, she is and has been in love, since she was 16 years old, with her brothers friend.

“Come on, you’ve fancied me since you were sixteen,” he goaded mercilessly.
“It was a temporary aberration. I’m cured of it now”

Except he only sees her as his best friends little sister, one that has to be looked out for, one with a witty mind, but still the little girl he’s known since he was a boy.

Raven, or William de I’Isle, Viscount Ravenwood, is the dashing devonaire, a spy for the English, a typical Don Juan de Marco. Money, grace, girls.... Except he really can’t have everything he desires, because SHE is the forbidden fruit, she is the little sister of his practically brother.

And while someone is trying to kill her, he is charged with the responsibility of keeping her safe, being this close to her is being more problematic for him, since he can’t seem to decide whether to strangle her himself, or kiss the ever living heck out of her.

“That’s true. You’ve resisted me for years. Why is that?” She fought the seductive pull of him.
“Because unlike so many of your conquests, I possess a working brain?”

So to keep her safe, he practically kidnaps her and takes her to an exciting adventure , new places!

The story is told by both points of view, and it is really good. The witty banter between them, and the chemistry is of the hook.

I can not begin to describe how it gripped me since the beginning, first two pages and you are hooked!!!!

Definitely a book I can and will recommend, and I look forward to reading more material from K.C. Bateman
K.C. Bateman

I received this ARC in an exchange for an honest review.

For more of my reviews, visit me at www.isatho2000.wordpress.com

Jennifer says

4.25 Stars

Why I Read It...

I adored the first book in the series, To Steal a Heart. Heloise and Raven were very minor characters in that book, but it was obvious that their story would be epic. I also was very lucky to receive a review copy from Loveswept via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

What I Liked About It...

1. Heloise was fantastic. She was smart, generous, and willing to learn from her mistakes. I just loved the whole concept of her being a code breaker and liked the little tidbits the author threw in about that world. I also appreciated Heloise's determination to live life the way she thought best rather than bowing to society's pressures.
2. Raven was a great hero for Heloise. His past and profession forced him to make difficult choices, but he was still a good person. I always have a soft spot for heroes who are in an unrequited love situation with the heroine. He respected Heloise's intellect and loved her for the amazing person that she was. I also liked the way he grew to have more confidence in his worth as a person.
3. Spies are not normally my cup of tea in historical romance, but I enjoyed the way K.C. Bateman handled that element. The plot was fast-paced and full of action. I liked the way the settings changed and allowed me to learn more about the time immediately after the end of the Napoleonic wars.
4. I have always been interested in the Hades/Persephone myth and thought this was a good retelling. I appreciated the tweaks that the author made to the original story such as the "kidnapping" and the pomegranate seeds. Anyone who is familiar with the myth will recognize the little details the author threw in, but also will probably enjoy the updates she made.

What I Disliked About It...

1. Raven had a few annoying moments where he kept harping on the fact that he believed he was unworthy

of Heloise. I understood why he felt that way, but it just kept being brought up even when it should have been obvious to him that Heloise didn't care.

Would I Recommend It...

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and am so happy that I discovered K.C. Bateman's historicals. Her characters, plots, and writing style really work for me so I look forward to what she does next. I definitely recommend this book if you like action and smart as a whip heroines with your romance.

Wendy says

A Raven's Heart is both the second in K.C. Bateman's *Secrets and Spies* series and her second published book - and what an exciting new addition to the genre she is. I was originally urged to read her début novel **To Steal a Heart** when it was first published by a respected friend/reviewer who was extremely impressed by it, but for various reasons, kept putting it off; now I'm wondering why on earth I didn't jump to it immediately, because my friend knew me better than I knew myself and I was quite blown away by **A Raven's Heart**.

William de l'Isle, Viscount Ravenwood, is an embittered and changed man since he was kidnapped six years earlier in an attempt to blackmail his grandfather, the Duke of Avondale. The duke, however, refused to pay the ransom demanded by the blackmailers, and misguidedly attempted to thwart the plot by employing his own investigators. Eventually, Ravenswood effected his own rescue and revenged himself upon his grandfather by refusing to have anything to do with him. Raven (as he is commonly known) then became an agent for the crown, a role for which he is well suited having gained confidence, fearlessness and ruthlessness whilst in captivity where he faced death on a daily basis. He fully accepts the new darker side to his character, but he can do little about the simmering attraction he feels for Heloise, a girl who can't simply be seduced and left.

Heloise Hampden is highly intelligent with an unusual gift for intricate code breaking. Her talent has been discovered and utilised in the continuing war against the French who are anxious to liberate Bonaparte from exile and return him to power. As a result of her success at breaking the complex coded messages intercepted by English agents, her life is in danger, and Raven is assigned by Lord Castlereagh, head of the Foreign Office, as her protector.

Raven grew up as a friend to Heloise's brothers, and the strong bond of friendship continues given that they are all in the same dangerous business. There has always been a spark of attraction between Raven and Heloise which they don't acknowledge but which they keep under wraps by sniping at each other with petty insults. Heloise deciphers a message from the French which relates to a friend of Raven's - fellow spy, Kit Carlisle - who is being held prisoner by the French. The message speaks of the possibility of an exchange of prisoners - Kit, for one of their valuable operatives; the exchange to take place in a village in Spain near the French border. And Raven, ruthless though he is, is also a man of integrity and loyal to a fault, so there is no question that he will do all in his power to rescue his friend; and as he must protect Heloise - she will travel with him.

The sexual tension between the two main protagonists fairly sizzles from beginning to end; Ms. Bateman has a rare talent for character development, they are superbly drawn - realistic and plausible. I just loved the tortured and damaged, but utterly gorgeous, Raven - what's not to love about this charismatic hunk, flaws

and all? Heloise - or Hell-cat as Raven refers to her - is a feisty, beautiful, headstrong and perceptive young woman. She is in love with Raven and always has been, but recognises the need to keep this revelation to herself. Instead she chips away at his defences and forces him to face up to his own shortcomings and feelings. These are two of the most likeable characters I have encountered recently in HR; although Heloise is an enlightened and strong young woman, she still retains her vulnerability and femininity; and although Raven is a cynical, fearless, arrogant, alpha male, he still has that little-boy-lost feel to his personality that we all love to love.

I thoroughly appreciated Ms. Bateman's eloquent writing style and her scholarship is evident in many subjects, but in particular, I loved her references to characters and languages from classical civilisation, which added another layer to an already fascinating and intriguing story. I found myself constantly referring to the kindle dictionary and actually learned a lot. I was impressed by the well researched, historically correct background to the story and the non fictional historical characters interwoven with the fictional. The story is romantic, witty, tense, funny and interesting and kept me enthralled to the end. Ms. Bateman certainly hit the ground running with this, her first series, *Secrets and Spies* and I look forward with anticipation to more from this talented author. Highly recommended.

Mei says

I received this book from Netgalley for my honest review.

I must say that I must have had enough of the same old *I'm too good for her* trope.

And here it is the leitmotiv of the whole story... :(

They lust for one another, but they **both** think they're not good enough for the other!!!

So what did he do? He treated her like an idiot (not that she's not acting like that all by herself!!!) to keep her at distance.... But, at the same time he didn't want to let her go with her life.

I could understand her bewilderment: poor Heloise, she didn't know what to think!!! On one instance he was seducing her, but as soon as she acted on it he pushed her away! And he did it constantly!!!

Raven was not a hero for me here! He was like a spoilt child: I don't want her, but if I can't have her nobody can!!! That's not hero behaviour!

Also Heloise was stupid sometimes. She knew that some of her actions were stupid, but she did them all the same, just to spite Raven!

So, no, I didn't enjoy this story... sorry... :(

booksofallkinds says

Viscount Ravenwood, Raven to his friends, has found himself in many dangerous situations during his years as a spy, but his latest orders to protect Miss Hampden, a talented codebreaker, will be his most dangerous yet. For he has grown up alongside Heloise Hamden, as a best friend to her brothers, and has wanted her for as long as he can remember. But after his captivity, and the many unscrupulous things he has done for his country since then, Raven knows that she can never be his - she is too pure, too bright, for the dark world that he inhabits. Determined to keep her safe from the monsters that want her dead, Raven knows that he will also have to protect her from himself, and the desire he feels for her. If only his Hellcat will co-operate...

Heloise Hamden has always wanted freedom and adventure, a chance to be equal with her brothers and Raven. And after decoding an important message, she finds herself in the centre of espionage and a journey that will take her to Spain with Raven, where she cannot help her feelings bubbling over for the only man she has ever loved. Infuriating and tempestuous, Raven and Heloise try to stop the passion that erupts between them, but as danger closes in, will they ever have a chance to explore what is between them? And as Raven wants to save Heloise from himself, will he break her heart again in order to protect her?

A RAVEN'S HEART by K.C. Bateman is a passionate, exciting, dangerous Regency romance that will take your breath away. Raven has suffered greatly in his past and feels that he will never be good enough for Heloise - he cannot believe that she could love the darkness that he lives in, and he doesn't want to contaminate her world. Heloise has suffered too and she bears the scars to prove it, but she will not allow anything to stop her from going after what she wants and is a loveable, feisty heroine. With plenty of danger and sizzling scenes, the plot flows easily from beginning to end, and I could not put this book down. A RAVEN'S HEART by K.C. Bateman is a wonderful read and I highly recommend it!

*Book received from Netgalley.com

Barbara Rogers says

I received an ARC of this book from NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review

This is the first book I've read by K. C. Bateman, but it definitely won't be the last because I LOVED it!!! This is the second book in the Secrets and Spies series, but I haven't read the first book so I can truthfully tell you that this can be read as a stand-alone book. However, I enjoyed this one so much I'm going to read the first one and then look forward to the next one!!!

The characters are complex, the banter is witty and the excitement is intense throughout the entire book. I'm not sure I really understand why the hero feels so totally unworthy -- he certainly hasn't done any more 'bad' stuff than his fellow friends (who are all spies).

Lady Heloise Hampden is the sister of Nicholas who was the hero in the first book of the series - To Steal A Heart. Both of Heloise's brothers are spies for the crown during the Napoleonic wars and Heloise wanted to do her part as well. She's brilliant and gifted at breaking codes, so she becomes a code breaker for the crown. She's part of a very small, select group who receive the secret coded messages intercepted from French spies and try to break them. That group has been targeted by a French assassin and Heloise's friend and collaborator has been killed and an attempt has been made on Heloise's life.

Heloise is very, very intelligent, stands up for herself, says what she thinks and is pretty much fearless (or naive in not recognizing danger). At any rate, she's a pampered princess who really doesn't need that

pampering. She also lives on the estate neighboring our hero.

William Ravenwood (known as Raven) is an heir to a dukedom and is a fearless spy for the English crown. He was kidnapped at nineteen and held for ransom. His grandfather, regrettably, let his pride get in the way and didn't pay the ransom. Instead, he hired his own Bow Street Runners to find his grandson. Unfortunately, the Runners didn't find him in time and the boy was tortured severely before he managed to kill his guard and escape. He's never forgiven his grandfather and now feels that anyone he loves and is supposed to love him will leave him.

Heloise and Raven have loved each other since they were children, but Raven wouldn't acknowledge it -- because -- well -- you just don't pursue your best friend's sister. Then, after the kidnapping, he just didn't feel lovable and wouldn't acknowledge it. Heloise, on the other hand was, at one point, perfectly willing to acknowledge it and act on it.

Raven is given the job of protecting Heloise from the assassins and he really, really doesn't want to be assigned that job -- but -- he doesn't want anybody else to have it either because he's sure he can/will protect her better than anyone. At the same time Heloise has broken a code and deciphered a message that she believes references one of Raven's best friends who has been missing (and assumed dead) for the last two years.

When Heloise shares the contents of the message with Raven he wants to head to Spain right away to rescue his friend -- but -- he has to protect Heloise. So what does any macho male do in this situation? Well -- he takes her with him!

Heloise and Raven take his boat to Spain and start a cross-country journey to rescue Raven's friend Kit. Heloise looks on it as a wonderful adventure and they draw closer and closer throughout the journey.

There is LOTS of chemistry and the temperature between the two is pretty HOT, but you won't find but just a couple of more explicit sexual scenes.

I hope you'll enjoy this book as much as I did!

Sissy's Romance Book Review says

'A Raven's Heart' by K.C. Bateman is book two in the "Secrets and Spies" series. I have read the previous book but this book is a standalone book for sure.

This is the story of Heloise Hampden and William de l'Isle, Viscount Ravenwood.

Ravenwood is a spy along with Heloise's brothers. Ravenwood and Heloise's brothers are like family but there has always been something between Heloise and him. But when Ravenwood was about 18 years he turned down Heloise feelings when she tried to move forward with her feelings. This started them no longer being real friends. Then life got in there way... Heloise had a physical change that made her more bookish then before..having her staying to herself more. Ravenwood also went through something that he felt changed him and his trust of people. So a few years later in the present day of the book we find that Ravenwood is being asked to guard Heloise since her life is endangered because of her decoding work she does to help her brothers and fellow spies. This along with something else throws Ravenwood and Heloise into adventure that forces them to acknowledge there attraction/feelings.

I really enjoyed this book and the previous one "To Steal a Heart". The only thing is these books once you

start reading them you do not want to put it down. I just can't wait for the next new book to come out by Ms. Bateman!!

I received an eARC, from NetGalley and the publisher, in exchange for an honest review.

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Vellum Voyages says

4.5 helms

Please follow me on my blog :) Review originally posted on Vellum Voyages

Get ready to feel the yearn in this book! Raven & Heloise just burn up the pages! We get a tease of their story in "To Steal A Heart" and now that we get to read their story in "A Raven's Heart" it does not disappoint! The chemistry was scorching between these two and boy was it fun to watch them both struggle against their wills for each other!

William Ravenwood (Raven) is tortured by his past after being kidnapped at nineteen and held for ransom, which his grandfather, the Duke refused to pay. Bitter and hurt by this betrayal, he shirks his responsibilities to his title and involves himself in a spy ring which also include Nicolas Hampden, his childhood friend and neighbour from the previous book. He is known as The Raven, a smuggler, and an agent who rescues hostages and prisoners of war from captivity. Raven is on a mission to discover the fate of his fellow colleague, Christopher 'Kit' Carlisle as Kit has been missing for two years. Heloise, a code breaker for the English government and the younger sister of Nicolas and Richard Hampden has known Raven since childhood and has always loved him. Her youthful declaration of her love at sixteen was rejected by him and even though she has tried to put that incident behind her and move on with her life, her heart has always belonged to Raven. Raven knows this and also secretly harbours feelings for Heloise but considers himself too tainted for her since his capture. He puts distance between them and avoids her as much as possible but she is never far from his thoughts. Heloise decodes a message stating Kit is alive and under capture in Spain, which places her in grave danger as French agents are targeting and killing all English code breakers. Circumstances change suddenly for them as Raven wants to rescue Kit immediately but he is also determined to protect Heloise with his life even if it means taking her against her will to be with him in Spain at all times. Placed in such close proximity to each other, their attraction to each other reaches a crescendo which they both cannot turn away from. Raven constantly tortures himself with the knowledge that he is not good enough for her and Heloise finds Raven an enigma difficult to decipher but their connection to each other is unmistakable and an anchor to which they are pulled inexorably towards until love heals both their scars.

I love this theme of childhood love and the passion that arises when both sides are struggling so hard against their love for each other! Raven and Heloise are just perfect for each other and you can determine that from

the first few pages. Heloise is a strong heroine which I love! Not only is she intelligent, she's a damn brilliant code breaker and no shrinking violet. She thinks Raven will never love her back especially after the scar on her face which ruined all other prospects of marriage for her. She throws herself in her work, resigning herself to a life of solitude but utilizes this opportunity with Raven to go after what she has always wanted, even if it means getting hurt in the process. Heloise has gumption and grit and she is truly worthy of Raven's hard earned love. Raven is such a tough nut! He is just so determined to stay away from Heloise, which made his fall all the more sweeter. I must admit though I didn't feel like I understood the full extent of why Raven thought he was so flawed for Heloise. I get that he was tortured during his captivity and he realized that he loved Heloise during that time and then he felt undeserving of her love ever since. A little more depth about his reasoning would have added more to the story but otherwise I really really liked Raven! He was cheeky, a rogue he made a very dashing hero and smuggler!

Adventurous and combustive this romance has everything! I just loved the comparison between Hades/Raven and Persephone/Heloise! K.C Bateman again nails a truly unique declaration of love! Loved it!

*Thank-you K.C Bateman, Netgalley & Random House Publishing Group-Loveswept for the ARC

Laura says

ARC Provided by the Publisher and NetGalley

Historical romance is a genre that is hit or miss for me. I often either find the heroine to be too "modern" and not believable...or so of her time that I am not able to relate. Heloise was neither. She was feminine, appropriate for the time, and still relatable. The reason that Raven would be attracted to her was readily apparent.

Raven was also enjoyable. Capable, heroic, but also passionate and clearly in love with Heloise...although denying it adamantly and to anyone who would listen...until he wasn't. This was a fun best friend's little sister romance with a hint of danger, a little intrigue, and some spies.

K.C. Bateman writes in a way that the descriptions are vivid without being too wordy...they enhance the scenes without making them drag. The writing was strong, the pacing smooth and the story flows very well. This is a historical novel that hits all the right notes and leaves you with a thoroughly entertaining read.

I recommend this book.

***This and other reviews also featured on "I'm A Sweet and Sassy Book Whore"
<http://www.imasweetandsassybookwhore.com>***

Esther says

ARC Netgalley for honest review. Rating 4.5

What an enriching and character driven romance.

Our tortured hero, Raven was taken at the age of nineteen and held for ransom. Unfortunately his grandfather never paid the ransom thinking he could hire someone to rescue Raven. Sadly during this time he was tortured and at some point escaped on his own. He was changed from that point on, feeling betrayed and broken. He became a spy for the English crown and was very good at what he did.

Lady Heloise was the sister to the hero from the previous book. She also works for the crown as a code breaker. She's smart, bright, independent, sassy, very sassy, but also kind and sweet. Loved this heroine. Heloise has a scar on her face due to an unfortunate accident and she's somewhat conscientious about it and feels it makes her somewhat less attractive (she struggles with it somewhat but doesn't let it rule her life), especial to Raven who she's loved forever.

Raven is best friends with Heloise's brothers and lives next door. They each have had feelings for each other, since forever and have kept it to themselves. Well except that one time Heloise was sixteen and she expressed herself to Raven but he rejected her (this occurred after his kidnapping and so he believes he's to damaged for Heloise). The two put the incident behind them and in fact now seem to goad and torment each other whenever they are in close proximity. Sparks fly!!!

Kit, a fellow partner who also works for the crown, has been missing. Heloise has cracked a code that gives hope that he is alive. Raven is now asked to protect Heloise as she is in danger due to cracking the code. Raven decides he's going to go on a search and rescue for Kit and of course Heloise is coming with him.

Wow, what a fun, fast paced (just a few spots that lagged just a little) steamy, sweet romance. We had angst, which was very well done and not over the top, wonderful dialogue with a lot of sparks and C H E M I S T R Y. But, a very small but, I did fine a couple loves scenes/steamy scenes somewhat awkward or a little off. I think as this author continues to write and produce more books this will flow more smoothly. I really can't say enough how well this author writes characters with depth and how well they evolve. The hero was just the right amount of alpha, protective, sweet and hot. And the heroine I found to be well rounded in intelligence and as well as having a soft/tender side too.

This is the second historical for this author and I see great things ahead for her if she keeps writing like this.

Tracy DeNeal says

Raven and Heloise

The bickering and banter in this work was so sweet. Two people hopelessly in love, but bound and determined to stay apart. I mean, a man cannot lust after his best friends' little sister after all.

I enjoyed reading the push and pull of the protagonists as they navigated the vagaries of a life and death mission.

If you like a romance where the declarations are clear in the individuals' heads, but not public, you will enjoy this work.

WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says

2.5 stars

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

Heloise and William have danced around each other for a long time. As his bestfriend's little sister, William has tried to distance himself from Heloise while she has decided after once being rejected by him to protect her heart. They both have their share of scars, both internally and physically, but staying apart might be hurting them more than helping.

With Heloise in danger, William can't let her out of his sight. As they are forced together and their walls start coming down, it starts to become clear that the only way they can truly heal is with the love of the other.

"thou shalt not covet thy best friend's little sister."

Second in the Secrets and Spies series, *A Raven's Heart* can be read as a standalone. It's obvious that there is a continuous story thread involving the spy aspect but I never felt lost or confused, in fact it only made me curious about the first book in the series and future ones. I thought this started off very strong with the tension between our two leads. I will show up every time for the brother's friend, little sister trope and I thought that dynamic was portrayed very well here; a little less involvement with her brother's approval/disapproval and more shared history and emotional ties. As the story went on though, I thought the hero had disconnect between him continuously spouting (this was brought up a bit too much) about how he wasn't good enough for Heloise but still engaging physically with her. It was disorientating because I'm supposedly supposed to buy into his torment over not feeling good enough for her but at the same time he's constantly kissing on her and pushing their physicality. His reasoning for not feeling good enough for her was already a little murky, we are told he was kidnapped when he was younger and had to fight his way free but not given a clear enough picture to understand why he would demonize himself because of his actions. As the story goes on we learn he is a spy where he has to kill people occasionally, which fits better into the not feeling good enough narrative. If their intimate situations hadn't been ramped up so quickly in the beginning, I would have been able to follow along and connect with William's gradual breaking down and inability to stay away from Heloise.

"You want to pretend this scar isn't there, but it's what makes you you."

I was quite fond of Heloise as she was the little too smart for her own good, word loving, and scared bluestocking. Her personality quirk of etymology spouting was cute but I have read a heroine or two who could be her twin sister. Which is the main problem I had with this story, I've read it before. Again, I've read a ton of books from this sub-genre, which could maybe the problem in itself, but there was nothing new here. The writing is good and there are many crowd pleaser moments and lines, but maybe too many. It almost felt like the writer wrote what she thought a romance should be by taking good tropes, scenes, and lines and creating a story around that instead of having characters and story emerge from her. There was a kissing in the rain scene that should have felt emotionally powerful but all I could do was think about other scenes like that I have already read and compare them; this story was full of moments like that for me. Someone newer to the genre would probably not have the same problem I did. I've read Joanna Bourne's Spymasters series, which utilizes the same tropes and ideas as this but adds enough intrigue and emotion to distance itself from the similarities and be completely compelling.

She gave a watery laugh, "I might want to kill you, Ravenwood, but I'd never want you dead."

Heloise and William have a very back and forth relationship with them challenging each other that was fun to read. I just ran into the problem of having read it done better, I can read the same tropes over and over but I need fresh spins and/or deep emotional connections to the characters that I just couldn't seem to get here; there was a lack of "it" factor. Secondary characters stayed fairly close to the sides but there were a couple that I wouldn't mind knowing more about. This is also true for the spy ring the author has set up, there's enough there to grab your attention. I will say there were some comments made by Heloise regarding other women, former mistresses/courtesans and generally beautiful women, which felt mean spirited. There was a little bit of all those women are man hungry airheads; I could do without women on women hate and more female friendships. (Not suggesting Heloise would be friends with these women but less generalized superiority comments)

K.C. Bateman looks to be a newer author and I definitely see some promise in her writing, I would just like to hear more of her individual voice. There was good story plot progression and natural flowing interaction between the characters. I'll be going back and reading the first in the series and be on the lookout for the next in the series. If you're looking for a sweet "I'm not good enough for you but I can't stay away" with some road adventure, you might want to try this new author.

Carol *Young at Heart Oldie* says

I loved TO STEAL A HEART, Ms. Bateman's debut novel, and the first book in her *Secrets and Spies* series. I was hoping that A RAVEN'S HEART would be just as good, and I certainly wasn't disappointed.

Six years ago, nineteen-year-old William de L'Isle, Viscount Ravenwood (Raven), was kidnapped and held for ransom. A proud and stubborn man, his grandfather, the Duke of Avondale, refused to pay the kidnappers, hoping to thwart their plans by hiring Bow Street Runners to find his grandson. Meanwhile, William endured eight weeks in captivity, facing beatings and potential death every day. Finally, he managed to escape by killing one of the guards, but the experience left him a changed man. He has never forgiven his grandfather, refusing to have anything to do with him and rejecting the titles due to him following his father's death. Instead, he joined Lord Castlereagh's spy network, working alongside his childhood friends and fellow spies, Richard and Nicolas Hampden. Ruthless, deadly and efficient, it is a job he excels at, killing without guilt or remorse.

Heloise Hampden, Richard and Nicolas's younger sister, has always had a rebellious streak, hating the restrictions placed on women by society and longing for freedom and adventure. When her face is scarred trying to save her brother from drowning, thus curtailing her marriage prospects, her life becomes one of scholarly pursuits. Her skill at code-breaking brings her to the attention of Lord Castlereagh and she relishes the opportunity of serving her country decoding French messages. When a fellow code-breaker is murdered, and an attempt is made on Heloise's life, Castlereagh assigns Raven to protect her.

However, Raven and Heloise (or Hellcat as he calls her) grew up on neighbouring estates and, as her brothers' friend, he was a frequent visitor to the Hampdens. There has always been a strong spark of attraction between them that neither would acknowledge. They managed to conceal their true feelings by exchanging barbed insults, but the mutual attraction shows no sign of abating.

Hellcat Hampden had been the subject of his guilty daydreams for years. What had started out as adolescent musings had matured into fevered erotic fantasies that showed absolutely no sign of abating.

♥ ♥ ♥

She was fluent in five different languages, but in Raven's presence she could barely string a coherent sentence together.

Heloise decodes a letter suggesting that Raven's friend, Kit Carlisle, who has been missing for two years, is alive and an exchange of prisoners is possible. This exchange is to take place in a small Spanish village just over the French border and Raven is determined to rescue his friend, but he must also protect Heloise and there is only one way to do that – take her with him.

Raven is one of those gorgeous, cynical, arrogant, tormented heroes that I can't resist, while Heloise is my sort of heroine – intelligent, headstrong, stubborn and unconventional, although she does have one sinful extravagance which Raven certainly approves of!

These two have an amazing chemistry and I enjoyed their entertaining and witty repartee.

He chinked the rim of his own glass against hers and downed the contents. "Bottoms up."

With a mental shrug Heloise did the same. Her throat caught fire. Tears sprang to her eyes. When she could catch her breath she croaked out, "Good Lord! That's vile." Raven grinned and took her empty glass.
"Good girl. Now, as you rightly said, I have to 'go captain.' Is there anything else you require?"

"Only your absence," she managed.

He backed out the door with a mocking flourish. "Your humble servant."

He took two more glasses from a servant. "Here, drink this."

She accepted it without thinking. A drunken reveler jostled her arm and a cold wash of champagne splashed onto her chest and trickled down between her breasts. "Oh, bugger-and-arse!" she muttered.

"That's what I love about you, Hellcat. Always so ladylike. Just when I despair that the impulsive hellion I grew up with has vanished, you say something like that and the world rights itself again."

She growled at him. Actually growled.

"You shouldn't do that, either," he admonished gently. "It makes little wrinkles in your nose."

Every scene just sizzles with sexual tension and their feelings of frustration, longing, fear, regret and desire are palpable. Ms. Bateman creates a delicious sense of anticipation and when they finally make love, it just feels right. The love scene is beautifully done – tender, romantic, sensual and laced with moments of humour. There is just the right balance between the action and romance and the dangers Raven and Heloise face along the journey only serve to heighten the sexual tension.

Raven believes that because he embraced his darker emotions, he is unworthy of someone as good as Heloise. When he tells Heloise of everything he endured during his imprisonment, it gave me a real

understanding of the deep emotional impact it had on him and how he was changed by the experience. Only Heloise can cut through the anger and bitterness to convince him that he is loyal, brave and fearless; willing to do whatever it takes to protect those he loves and cares about. Heloise is his anchor and keeps him grounded.

I like how Raven doesn't see Heloise's scar as ugly but as proof that she is a survivor and I love his words to her.

"You're like the moon. IT has craters and scars and shadows. But only an idiot would deny that it is beautiful."

The scene between Raven and his grandfather is an emotional one. Raven comes to realise that his grandfather is only human and made mistakes just as he himself has. He now sees rejecting his father's titles as an insult to his parents' memory and to everything he could be.

Ms. Bateman has obviously undertaken a lot of research to create a real sense of the period and I love how she weaves fascinating historical details, mythology and real people into the story. I particularly like how her expert knowledge of antiques comes into play where she refers to the ancient Japanese art of Kinstukuroi, cleverly revealing how much Raven cares for Heloise.

MY VERDICT: A well-written and engaging story with fascinating characters, adventure, danger, sizzling sexual tension and witty repartee. Highly recommended.

Secrets and Spies series (click on the book covers for more details):

I received a complimentary copy from the publisher via NetGalley for the purposes of an honest review

This review was first posted on my Rakes and Rscals Blog:

<https://rakesandrascals.wordpress.com...>

alexis says

First off, this book uses the 'G' slur so not a great start.

I think I got this ebook on sale a couple weeks ago and the premise sounded vaguely intriguing. Overall, this story is particularly terrible nor is it particularly good. The characters and the Romance fell flat. And when will authors stop using the G slur ffs.

Caz says

4.5 stars rounded up.

I fairly raved about K.C. Bateman's début novel, *To Steal a Heart*, earlier this year. It's the rare first book that gets that sort of praise, but Ms. Bateman's writing, characterisation, plotting and dialogue were so exceptionally good, and the book overall was so enjoyable that I couldn't do anything other than award it DIK status. Naturally, I hoped that her second book, **A Raven's Heart**, would be as good and simultaneously worried that it might not be – but I'm happy to say that it's every bit as entertaining and well-put together as **To Steal a Heart**.

William de l'Isle, Viscount Ravenwood – known simply as Raven – played a small supporting role in the previous book when he aided the escape of the hero and heroine from France. He's a close friend of the Hampden family – of Nic (hero of **To Steal a Heart**), and his brother Richard – who also work as government agents – and their younger sister, Heloise, a talented codebreaker and the bane of Raven's existence. But when one of Heloise's colleagues is murdered by a French agent and it becomes clear that she is now the next likely target, Raven is tasked with keeping her safe while the killer is tracked down and neutralised.

The trouble is that Raven and Heloise can't be in the same room without annoying the hell out of each other. Raven frequently tells himself that there must be some sort of unwritten rule to the effect that *thou shalt not lust after thy best friend's little sister* – but the trouble is that, unwritten rule or not, he is desperately attracted to Heloise, and no matter how much he tries to curb it, the attraction just won't go away. All he can do is make sure she doesn't discover how he feels, so, in the manner of overgrown schoolboys everywhere, he has to content himself with pulling her metaphorical pigtails by means of outrageous flirting and lots of delicious, snark-filled banter.

Heloise Hampden thinks that Raven is the most arrogant, infuriating man she has ever met. The trouble is, he's also the most gorgeous, charming and witty man she's ever met. He doesn't want her though – she still cringes to think of the occasion, six years ago, when she plucked up the courage to kiss him and he rejected her – so what else can a girl do but give back as good as she gets in their verbal bouts and never let him know how she feels?

Okay, so it's a well-trod path. Both characters are desperate for each other but for various reasons are determined not to let the other know how they feel. But the chemistry between Heloise and Raven is completely off the charts and their dialogue is just to die for. The highest compliment I can probably pay Ms. Bateman here is to say that many of these exchanges reminded me of Loretta Chase; they're quick, snappy, witty, flirtatious, often quite revealing and, most importantly, feel completely natural and unforced.

(The pair are pretending not to know each other at a masked ball -)

"[Ravenwood's] previous mistress was French. And the one before that an Italian opera singer. I suppose taking up with foreigners saves him from having to exert himself to actually talk to them."

He slanted her a wicked sideways glance. "I'm fairly sure he doesn't engage them for conversation."

... "Well, I expect she'll be released soon enough. Ravenwood seems to be able to snap his fingers and have any woman he wants."

... “It’s true Ravenwood’s never had a problem attracting most women,” he continued, as if they were discussing nothing more innocuous than the weather. “Nothing elicits desire in a female more than the promise of a ducal title and an outrageously large” – he paused teasingly – “house.”

She glanced up at the ceiling and pretended to admire the soaring architecture. “It’s certainly impressive,” she said, straight-faced. “Very... imposing.”

“Ravenwood would be delighted to hear it. A man never tires of women praising the size of his endowments.”

Raven isn’t at all pleased at the prospect of having to play nursemaid to the young woman who maddens and attracts him in equal measure, but on the other hand, he is driven to protect the people he cares about and there’s no way he is going to entrust her safety to anyone else. When she decodes a message which may lead him to the location of a missing friend and fellow agent, Raven doesn’t hesitate to act. He’s heading for Spain immediately, and as he isn’t leaving Heloise’s side, ergo, she’s going to Spain, too.

“People will think we’ve eloped.”

“Not if they know either one of us,” he replied succinctly. “If we both disappear they’re more likely to assume I’ve murdered you and fled the country.”

The story then shifts to a Spain that has been ravaged by war. From the bustling harbour at Santander to a countryside littered with burned out villages, Ms. Bateman does an excellent job with her descriptions of the landscape and in describing the difficulties of the journey that Heloise and Raven have to undertake. As was the case in the previous book, the author strikes a good balance between the romance and the action, and does a good job in creating real sense of peril when necessary and delivering high-stakes drama that is never overplayed or drawn out. I have a real weakness for adversarial couples who cover up their real feelings beneath layers of sexually-charged verbal sparring, and there are only a handful of authors who can do it this well. Raven and Heloise absolutely hit the spot as a couple and as individuals; she’s forthright, clever and determined and he’s simply delicious – intelligent, witty, a bit naughty and fiercely competent, all qualities which turn me into mush.

For all his gorgeousness though, there’s one aspect of Raven’s character that doesn’t quite work and which makes use of one of my least favourite romance genre tropes – the “I am unclean and not worthy to kiss the hem of your raiment” one. Raven is a spy and a ruthlessly efficient killer. He’s killed often and kills without conscience, knowing he is doing what he has to do in order to protect others. But that is his reason for believing he can’t be with Heloise; he is irrevocably sullied and his touch will contaminate her. And there’s also the fact that a traumatic event that took place six years earlier has made him believe the only person he can ever rely on is himself, and he has therefore resigned himself to a life alone. I can certainly understand why both those things would leave some mental and emotional scars, but I wasn’t really convinced, and he gets over them with very little trouble.

But those are minor criticisms in the grand scheme of things, and overall, **A Raven’s Heart** is a fast-paced, thoroughly entertaining novel that’s definitely going onto my keeper shelf. The writing is confident and

intelligent, the romance is sensual and well-developed, and K.C. Bateman's research into and knowledge of the history of the period is evident from her descriptions of contemporary events and locations. I'll admit that the odd modern turn of phrase creeps in now and then, but that wasn't enough to wipe the grin off my face when Raven and Heloise were butting heads, or spoil my overall enjoyment of the story. You don't need to have read **To Steal a Heart** in order to enjoy this, but if you enjoy romantic adventure stories in which the sexual tension between the principals is hot enough to melt your Kindle, then you won't want to miss either book.
