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Charlotte Lamb

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Their tenth anniversary was a day of reckoning

Francesca couldn't live with her phony marriage a day longer, couldn't let matters continue to drift.

To the outside world, she had everything - an attractive, successful husband, a healthy son and a beautiful country home. But Oliver lived for his work and increasingly, Francesca suspected, for his glamorous secretary.

Recklessly she took matters into her own hands. How would Oliver react when he realized he was in danger of losing his wife? Even more important - how did Francesca hope he'd react?

Runaway Wife Details

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From Reader Review Runaway Wife for online ebook

Megzy says

3.5 stars

I respected her and the various decisions she made to get her life back to become something meaningful and fulfilling and at the same time to observe her husband's relationship with his secretary before making a final decision about her marriage.

Leona says

Wow..this one was different. First, it was very well written and I shouldn't be surprised, since Charlotte Lamb was a very good writer. I often struggle with her romances because she writes such strong alpha males...and often pairs them with inferior women that can't hold their own.

But not in this book. Fran is a wonderful heroine who wakes up one morning disgusted with her husband, their marriage and what she has become. Oliver is a brilliant business man who has made it big quickly because of his brilliance, fortitude and hard work. Unfortunately, he now has developed an ego the size of Long Island and believes the world needs to fall in line with him.

I love stories about second chances and this book did not disappoint. Heroine gets even with the hero....and forces him to look at himself, the life he has built and their marriage. Throw in a deliciously plotting evil OW....along with a sweet OM (who secretly pines for the heroine) and you have a great story.

If you want a fun, fast entertaining read...I suggest this one!

Claire says

I liked this book because of the way the heroine Francesca took charge of her unhappy marriage. At first, it appeared as if simple resentment for being abandoned on their 10th anniversary prompted her to leave her husband, Oliver. Her decision to walk out and head for London was impulsive, not premeditated. But it was actually the final straw to years of being relegated to the sidelines as a mother and homemaker and of feeling ignored by her busy husband. She then slowly re-established herself in the computer company which she along with her husband had co-founded with a long-time friend, Matt. She self-confessed in the end that she had never meant to let Oliver go without a fight so her departure for London was actually a subconscious act to take the fight to his turf, confront the OW, and get him back.

I absolutely enjoyed reading her torment of the hero. Once in a blue moon, we get a heroine who can truly agitate a situation, taunt the hero and play the **jealousy card** so well. Francesca had Oliver so tied up in knots that for most of the story, he was either chasing her or begging her to come back. At times already, she seemed to take perverse delight in provoking the hero like when she played Matt off against him as payback for his presumed affair with his secretary. There was really no need for her to go to the business reception with Matt -- I thought it was foolhardy of her -- because Oliver had offered to take them all out on a belated

anniversary dinner but she refused him to remind him of that old saw: what's good for the goose is good for the gander.

In fact, I think her actions created unresolved problems in the future with Matt. He had been just content being the side-kick genius and the eternal Peter Pan to the alpha-dominant Oliver but you wonder how long this arrangement would continue once Francesca is fully entrenched in the company as they were planning at the book's end. Francesca had already awakened the sleeping giant of attraction in Matt.

As for the infidelity issue, I believed Oliver when he denied any affairs. He was **too devastated** to learn of his wife leaving the family home. Given already their emotional estrangement and lack of intimate relations, a man with a history of straying would have grabbed this opportunity to fool around even more, not debase himself to win her back.

Good read.

Naksed says

HAIKU BOOK REVIEW: *Runaway Wife*, by Charlotte Lamb.

Husband cheats, wife stays,
Other Woman promoted.
Who is the winner?

Booked says

I've forgotten about this. There's this playful winning quality about the hero. It's worth the read and his very character actually steals the story. Of course they have this huge misunderstanding they had to clear up which makes for rock solid conflict. The fun was the hero's scheme in how to capture his runaway wife.

Marajean says

On their tenth anniversary, hero ditches and doesn't call her because he has a crisis with his company. *an explosion at a factory*.

Heroine is tired of being left behind all the time and taken for granted so she leaves also. She goes and meets up with her hubby's business partner and convinces him to give her a job working in the company as his secretary. She also tells him that she's living in London and she left her hubby.

Of course she's aware that something is going on with her hubby's secretary but she's not sure how going on it is. The secretary makes no bones about letting her know that she's not wanted, and the business partner also thinks something is going on with the secretary. All the workers know that the secretary wants him and most of them think something is going on and some of them want to believe that nothing is going on and he's too smart to fall for her.

The hero holds himself to a different standard than everyone else and thinks he's some kind of god in the business.

The heroine really doesn't fall all over herself over him but it's known that she DOES want her marriage to work but is really separated from him and won't go back to him unless they can both work out the problems.

The ending was really abrupt and I don't feel like the problems were solved to my satisfaction, but it was really nice seeing the heroine not give in to him.

This book should have been longer, and more hero suffering. He had some justifications for his actions but at the same time he's not quite convincing enough that he loves her.

I did believe that he didn't have an affair with the secretary, but I found the kissing scene overly contrived. More a problem with the author's handling of it than him lying. It was a very awkward explanation.

KC says

This marriage-in-trouble romance illustrates how a strong woman can have her man hanging by the balls, so to speak. I love to hate (or is it hate to love?) this trope because the romantic in me feels bad for those poor, besotted schmucks—the men, not the balls. I still zipped through though, relishing the snappy dialogue and chemistry along the way.

The central conflict revolved around Francesca deciding to leave Oliver, her husband of ten years, because she couldn't tolerate an unhappy marriage any longer.

(view spoiler)

I liked both protagonists, especially Oliver. I believe he still loved her and could see how much Francesca's desertion bothered him. His jealousy of the other man and own workaholic attitude helped convince me that he remained faithful. I liked the vulnerability Oliver expressed at the reconciliation scene. It also gave a plausible reason for why he'd pulled away from their marriage. (Too bad this was thrown in at the end because an earlier introduction and deeper exploration might have upped the angst.)

For having an elegant name, Francesca was an earthy and spunky heroine. However, I didn't like how she seemed **more intent on making Oliver pay for his neglect** than fighting for her marriage, which she claimed had always been her intention. Stringing the OM along and avoiding one's estranged husband doesn't present a strong case. Fran also didn't say ILY to Oliver at the end. He said them to her, and yes, we knew she loved him, but it places a romantic bow on the HEA when they're spoken. As if I didn't have enough acronyms in this paragraph, here's another one: YMMV.

7.21.2018 update

Acronym cheat sheet

OM: Other man

ILY: I love you

HEA: Happily ever after

YMMV: Your mileage may vary

Amanda Sheila says

It's been a while since I rated a book with a star.

I don't understand why people enjoyed this book. I'm really sorry, Miss Charlotte Lamb, but this book is annoying. Seriously.

There's no part of it that made me happy. Annoyed, yeah. I mean, the hero's a jerk and I couldn't feel his 'apology' at all. Her wife thinks that he's having an affair yet he made no move to clear the air until she did the drastic.

I don't like the wife either because, if I stand in a same room with a woman who 'stole' my husband, I'll claw her and bitchslap her. But not Francesca. She just stand still and enjoying the husband-stealer's mockery. Whaaa?

I always love book with heavy angst. But this one, it's not working for me.

Booklover says

Must say a good book.nicely written,Heroin was shown head strong which i loved the most abt the book and hero he was a good man but sometimes a jerk and way he abuses heroin in book at the end,he called her B**** which i hated the most

Otherwise a nice book,excellent read

Recommend it

StMargarets says

Well, this was an interesting second chance story. It was extremely well-written (It's Charlotte Lamb, after all) but I couldn't rate it higher because the emotional stakes just didn't seem that high. The heart of the conflict between the H/h began when the hero pulled back after the h couldn't get pregnant a second time. She lives on the country estate by herself (son has gone to boarding school) and hubby is in the city making money.

What's likable about this scenario is that the heroine doesn't run *away* - she runs *to* the hero in London. She demands a job at their company (she's one third owner) and she plants herself in with the other secretaries and stares down the woman she thinks her husband might be having an affair with. Very

refreshing!

The one thing I didn't like about the heroine's actions during this time was how she used the third partner in the business, the shy computer nerd who obviously had a crush on her. Not fair to him.

Heroine did have some TSL moments - such as when she drove north into a blizzard without checking the weather first - but these were minimal. I liked how the hero opened up about his feelings at the end and don't think he cheated. (He had such tunnel vision of the business, I honestly don't think he thought about much else).

This is an interesting scenario for a second chance story. No big highs or lows - but a competent story.

reeder (reviews) says

There may be no romance author more cynical about the idea of romance itself than Charlotte Lamb. Modern authors like Jennie Lucas will openly play with the tropes the genre has built up over the last half century, but Lamb frequently just tears down the curtain to expose the fantasies underpinning the whole genre. And she does it within the confines of writing a category romance. This cynicism is frequently too much for me (*gives Obsession and Infatuation the side-eye*), but when it works, it's breathtaking.

Runaway Wife works.

She wasn't simple, either, although Oliver had apparently begun to think she was. Both her actions and her motives at the moment were very complex; she had decided to come to London partly to find out the truth about Oliver and his secretary, but partly for the reasons she had given both men. (pp.64-65)

Like most HPs of the 80s and early 90s, *Runaway Wife* is written entirely from the heroine's perspective in a third-person limited POV. We're utterly reliant on the heroine for understanding her husband, her marriage, the OW, the (poor, abused) wannabe OM, her invisible son...the works. And the reader quickly comes to realize she's a ruthlessly unreliable narrator. Not only are her opinions constantly in flux as she tries to determine if her husband is cheating on her with his secretary, but she's undecided in her plans and calculated in what she says to others vs what she keeps to herself and only reveals to the reader later.

(view spoiler)

Go, alpha heroine! ("Oliver belonged to her.")

The heroine's actions illustrate the same fluctuation as her words: the runaway wife abandons her husband

by leaving the residence he never visits to move to the city where he spends most of his time...but stays in her own flat. She finagles a job at his company, but works with the (poor, abused) OM. She's the dancing feather I taunt my cat with: always in sight, forever out of reach.

Meanwhile, Lamb has slyly introduced more cynical reality into the equation. The wife taunts her husband with the prospect of receiving half his shares in his beloved company as part of a divorce settlement, but she is horrified when the (poor, abused) OM reminds her that she already holds one third of the company in her own right because of an accounting maneuver when it was first established. The wife had assumed her husband's jealousy and renewed desire were the result of her presenting herself as a challenge. With this revelation, she is forced to consider that he's pursuing her only to prevent a divorce so he doesn't lose control of his company.

And the husband **is** worried: “...you’re trying to make it look as if you only started seeing Matt after you found out I was involved with Janice. If you can do that, it cancels out your infidelity, and the financial settlement will be all in your favour. If I’m not bloody careful, you’ll end up owning more of my company than I do!”” (p.115)

In classic Lamb fashion, this pecuniary motivation is never taken off the table, even with the HEA.

Regarding the question of the husband's fidelity, I feel very much on the knife's edge. I'm assuming the admission in his dialogue above ("you found out I was involved with Janice") is actually subjunctive because the H proclaims several times that he is not having an affair with the secretary, but Lamb clouds those denials with doubt:

“What about Janice?” she asked. “Tell me the truth, Oliver...have you been having an affair with her?”

“No, darling,” he said, kissing her throat with hot, pleading lips. “No.”

She couldn’t see his eyes to be certain that was the truth, but she wanted so much to believe him. (p.136)

I want to believe him, too, but I think escorting a woman into a party then making a solo trip back to your car in order to safely stow her expensive fur jacket is a boyfriend move, not a boss move. (Also, not PETA-approved.)

He lay there in silence for a moment, then said flatly, “I swear to you, I never had an affair with Janice.” (p.183)

This second one could just be me. I don't consider “flatly” to be a persuasive adverb. I'm looking for more emotion, while Lamb may be intending to convey he's delivering the denial in a tone of unvarnished truth. To me, it suggests there's something hidden. Plus, the denial is strangely specific. Even if we choose to believe the H, Lamb withholds the comfort of a global vow of fidelity. Janice isn't the only woman in London.

Moreover, the hero's explanation for the distance in their marriage over the past three years is that he felt

jealous of the heroine's devotion to their son, conflicted about having a second child, guilty for these feelings, and ultimately emasculated when it appeared he was unable to impregnate the heroine a second time. That last bit reads like a classic trigger for tomcatting. I'm only willing to cut the hero some slack because I don't think he could have conducted an affair without Janice knowing about it, and if Janice knew he was having an affair, she would have dropped hints for the wife.

The puzzle of the husband's fidelity is eternally entertaining because it can never be resolved. (hide spoiler)]

(Why exactly did I put page citations for all those quotes? Am I submitting this for senior English?)

Lu Bielefeld *read.laugh.love* says

I did not like the hero.

He dropped the heroine at their home in the country and continued his life in the city. And the secretary accompanied him in all social functions in the city and in his travels.

He dispatches their son to boarding school against the will of the heroine.

If he lived practically alone in London in my opinion he did not even care about his family. It was another sign of social status.

In my opinion he must have cheated on her at some point. He is too arrogant and too aggressive and in no time I felt that he really loved her. She is more of a possession.

Our heroine is a doormat and does nothing against the other woman. She should have marked her position from the start and not been passive.

She should have imposed her position as a partner in the company and put the secretary in her place or demanded that the bitch be fired.

Keeping the secretary was more important than keeping his marriage.

She should have kicked the hero's ass and ripped off the other woman's hair.

It was the last straw when Oliver could not make it home for their 10th wedding anniversary.

Miss Sylvester wasn't there. She was in Wales with Mr Ransom, Francesca was informed.

Francesca wished she had someone to talk over problems with, someone she could trust the way Oliver trusted Miss Sylvester.

He hadn't taken her seriously for years; she had merged with the wallpaper of his life, along with Lambourne, Jon, even his father. The things that really mattered to Oliver were up here, in London. This was where Oliver lived. Their home in Sussex was a place he visited, and she and Jon people he visited; they were peripheral to Oliver's real world, the business world in which Miss Sylvester and Matt belonged and where Oliver most truly existed, was most himself, a self Francesca did not know.

he shook her backwards and forwards so violently that her hair came tumbling down, the long blonde strands flying around her face and tangling in his fingers.

She hadn't been imagining things; there was something going on between Oliver and Janice Sylvester. Humiliation stung in her throat. It was bad enough that he had cheated on her, but for everyone to know about it made it seem worse.

You've been flying about all over the world with Janice Sylvester for years and getting away with.

Matt looked at him then. 'You're the one who keeps forgetting . . . that's why she left you!'

Oliver might not realise it, but by taking Janice instead of her to this party he was practically making a public announcement to the staff, and Janice feverishly wanted him to commit himself.

Janice was not having coffee. She was sitting on Oliver's lap, her arms around his neck, kissing him passionately.

She had begun to wonder months ago, puzzled by Oliver's lack of interest in her, by his long absences and his cold remoteness, picking up the malice and dislike in Janice's voice whenever they spoke on the telephone. It had all pointed to one answer--that Oliver was having an affair with his secretary--and everyone had been dropping hints since she started work here. Matt had betrayed his suspicions by his unhappy...

boogenhagen says

Re Runaway Wife - or The Emancipation of Francesca as I like to call it. So CL is back with a marriage in trouble book. This is actually one of CL's I really like, but I am not sure it is really romance, more a woman finding herself and taking charge of her life. This IS HPlania and CL no less, so there is a relationship in there, but ultimately I am not sure the marital salvation is more important than the relationship Fran develops with herself. We can call this one HPlania Women's Fic.

The book opens with Fran all dressed up in her massive country home. She is waiting for Oliver, her husband of 10 yrs to show up for their anniversary. Since Ollie dearest decided to send their 8 yr old son off to

boarding school, much against Fran's will, Fran has been at a loose end. Ollie is always in London and never comes home, she has no other children, even tho they have tried, and frankly her life is empty. Things need to be changin' and Fran decides this is the time to do it, her and Ollie need to have a Talk.

Except Ollie doesn't show, instead he has his bat witch secretary call Fran. There is an explosion at the company plant in Wales, and Ollie has to take off to fix it. This is the final straw for Fran. She is about done with this huge empty house, done with the bat witch's condescension and DONE with Ollie and his disappearing act. So Fran packs a bag and heads for London. She is getting a flat, a job at the family firm and maybe a divorce.

When she gets to London, she goes to Ollie's partner Matt in the family electronics firm and tells him she is going to be his new secretary. She gets an HP non-standard non-grotty flat, some lovely antiques to furnish it and we get a nice discussion on the merits of camembert cheese and french bread - sorry we only get cheese porn in this one, no Dover sole or croissants and cherry jelly.

Matt shows up to help her get her flat sorted and the two of them, the shy wife of the Sales Director and the Tech Nerd Genius, Matt, find a lot of common ground for discussion. Then Ollie shows up and he is irked, he hits Matt and Fran jumps in to tell Ollie off. She has just about had it with the probably cheating, too-big-for-his-britches bully boy and she is going to tell him so.

Ollie freaks out that his property is leaving his sorry hiney. Tho as Fran points out, Ollie left her for life and shags in London a long time ago. This REALLY irritates Ollie and when he starts shaking Fran in a temperamental fit, she passes out, then she kicks Ollie out of her new digs when she recovers. (That little scene is the only abusive H violence in the book, aside from roofie kisses, Ollie remembers to keep his hands to himself.)

So Fran starts working with Matt and finds out that not only is she a 1/3rd partner in the firm, she is a company director too. Fran makes friends with the other secretaries - except for Ollie's bit on the side bat witch and Fran is settling in and really enjoying herself, tho the marital situation remains undetermined on her side.

Ollie has been doing his best seductive rouge impersonation. There is an almost moment at their country home that gets interrupted when the local constable rings the door bell at two in the morning, (much to Fran's weak kneed lurve mojo will power lack relief.)

But Fran quickly concludes that Ollie isn't really into her, tho he swears he never slept with his secretary or dated her in a personal way, (whatever that means,) because Ollie can't afford to divorce her, If they part, Ollie will lose his company between what she already legally has and what she would get in the adulterous divorce settlement. (I have to admire Fran here, because she believes Ollie is cheating, she actually considers having an investigator follow him around, but then decides that is just too tacky and she will get her evidence on her own.)

Ollie tries harder to be charming and we find out his distance is because the h got heavily involved with motherhood right after their son was born and the h never wanted to get a lurve club groove on cause she was tired, and Ollie felt neglected. Then she wanted another baby and Ollie was having mental performance issues. He did not want to be told he was sterile when the h suggested tests, so he just left her in the country and focused on growing the business.

Fran is glad there is an understandable explanation for the growing distance and even tho Fran has had to

discourage Ollie's partner Matt from falling in love with her, things seem to be looking up on the "Can this marriage be saved side". Until the h gets a big potential client to come to the office to see a portable computer demonstration.

The h goes to find Ollie, as he is the sales part of the team. When she walks in his office, he has his bat witch secretary in his lap and tonsils are connecting. Then Fran announces the potential client's arrival and walks out with a lot of dignity. Right away she starts plotting her divorce strategy. Ollie tries to talk to Fran but she refuses and the client wants to talk about buying, so while Ollie is distracted, Fran sneaks off to boarding school in the North to see her son.

Except it is winter and it starts snowing and the h's car breaks down. Fran falls asleep waiting for someone to come by and that someone turns out to be Ollie. He wakes her up, all bundled up in sweaters and blankies, by sliding his hands up her shirt. Fran wakes up screaming. Then she smacks him hard on the face and this cues the roofie kisses. Fran bites him and Ollie is shocked that he is bleeding. They go find a pub in Ollie's car to wait out the storm and Fran makes Ollie sleep on the floor.

Ollie doesn't stay there tho, Fran wakes up again to the lurve club mojo taking over. Ollie tells Fran he loves her and doesn't want to divorce. He also fired his secretary and got her a management job in another country. Fran still loves Ollie and she has a feeling she just got preggers. So since she owns 1/3 of the company and is going to take over the PR/Advert side of the firm, she decides to stick out for the HP marriage saved HEA.

I like this one cause it isn't really about cheatin' Ollie and his ego. This is all about Fran and reclaiming her power and getting a life - Fran may be a dead loss in the detecting cheating stakes, cause while Ollie probably did not sleep with his secretary, he never mentions any other one nighter's he might have had. (I love how CL always focuses on a potential but ultimately unlikely OW and her h's never think that there might be some anonymous one somewhere else.)

So yes, I believe Ollie probably cheated, but Fran doesn't want to know and frankly, if she catches him acting funny again, she has more than enough power to dump Ollie and ruin him and Ollie knows it, so he will probably mind his behavior. Plus he seems really fascinated with the new Fran, so I would say Fran has him hooked and can keep him reeled in. I believed the HEA.

The dynamics of the h being assertive and developing herself and her own interests in the context of marriage is never done very often in HPlania. Daphne Clair did it, Emma Darcy and Miranda Lee will try the trope and not quite make it. But CL does an excellent job of showing what happens when the shine of getting the guy and the babies and the HEA wears off and how an h might go on with life after.

This one is on the required reading list, cause it really broadens the scope of all that HPlania and it's characters can be and Charlotte Lamb is one it's best tour guides.

Diya says

This was really good and another favourite by Lamb. I loved how Fran stood up to Oliver and I had doubts about the genuineness of his love but I think I was convinced by the end and in their HEA. By the. Fran got him where she wants him he might have strayed before but no anymore! Hugely recommend.

Kiki says

I really need to start adding note to self from now ones to why i need to avoid:

Hero is TSTL! He did NOTHING to salvage HIS marriage. May or may not have cheated on his wife, he just apparently DEFINITELY not cheated on her with a particular OW.

But of a dog in the manger attitude and a totally strong independent woman wasted on a weak backboneless hero!

KIKI! DO. NOT. GO. THERE!
