



Broken Wing

Judith James

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Set during the chaotic beginnings of Napoleon's rule, this saga tells the story of Gabriel St. Croix, a street survivor searching for a place to belong. Abandoned as a child and raised in a brothel, he has never known friendship or affection. Hiding physical and emotional scars behind an icy facade, his only relationship is with a young boy he has spent the last five years protecting from the brutal reality of their environment. But all that is about to change. The boy's family has found him, and they are coming to take him home.

Sarah Munroe blames herself for her brother's disappearance. When he's located, safe and unharmed despite where he has been living, Sarah vows to help the man who rescued and protected him in any way she can. With loving patience she helps Gabriel face his demons and teaches him to trust in friendship and love. But when the past catches up with him, Gabriel must face it on his own. Becoming a mercenary, pirate, and professional gambler, he travels to London, France, and the Barbary Coast in a desperate attempt to find Sarah again. On the way, however, he will discover the most dangerous journey and the greatest gamble of all is within the darkest reaches of his own heart.

Broken Wing Details

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Author : Judith James

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From Reader Review Broken Wing for online ebook

Eastofoz says

Why all the hoopla about this book I don't know. It's not really a romance novel even though it's touted as one. It's almost like an adventure story about a very damaged hero and it is ALL about the hero. The romance is a sub-story. What little steam there is is glanced over like you would find in regular fiction and after the first half of the book the h/h don't get together until the end --that's about 200 pages covering the hero and what happens to him --so it's not a romance for me.

There quite a bit of use of French and a glossary is provided at the back but there are misspellings or things that just don't sound right with the dialog of the story if that kind of thing bothers you. If you don't speak French you might find those smatterings romantic.

I never had any feelings for Gabriel and Sarah as a couple. Gabriel is too broken and needs too much care for my taste. The things that happened to him were horrible which the author brings out well enough and the same goes for his adventures in far off places, but as for the romance it's just not there. Some of the actions on the hero's part towards the heroine make no sense and frustrate the reader to the point that you just want the book to end. The ending is a bit too perfect and sticky sweet for me --suddenly everything is wrapped up with a pretty bow.

The story itself didn't really flow. It was like snippets of their lives that you think will eventually develop into a story that flows along but that didn't seem to happen.

Maybe if the book is approached as historical fiction one would enjoy it more but I've been told that it's one of those be all end all romances --- having read a few romances already it couldn't be farther from the mark.

Wollstonecraftmegirl says

DNF at 65%. I had to take a couple of days off from this in order to get my working life sorted before going away for a week and I found when I came back to my Kindle that I had absolutely no desire to spend even one minute of my holiday finishing it. You know what? Life is just too short when you feel like that about a book. And I suspect this is a specific thing to me, reviewers I respect and usually agree with really liked this one and I can see why. It's challenging and different and feels very realistic in terms of its setting. But, but some really significant issues.

It's very purple. Perhaps I would've persevered if I didn't find the writing style so jarring, but, for me, it didn't work. The sex scenes, well:

'He was intensely aware of his clothing, caressing and constraining, his erection heavy and turgid, twitching and swollen again this breeches.' [honestly, I read this and just cannot escape the conclusion that it's just a thoroughly unpleasant description - turgid is an awful word. I gather from all my knowledge of the male of the species that having a thwarted erection is frustrating but this makes it sound like a diseased animal dying an undignified death in the front of a man's trousers - somehow all at once hilarious and gross].

'With a guttural cry, he plunged himself into her slick, tight, heat. Oh Christ, he was in heaven!' (37%)

'Their groans and echoed wildly about the cabin as they consumed one another, ecstatic, eager and unrestrained. It was rapture when her tight hot muscles began to contract around him.' (48%)

It wasn't just the sex scenes either, the whole book (or what I read of it) was adjective heavy. There's plainly a market for this style of romance writing, but I'm not it.

The romance didn't work for me in two ways. Firstly I did think the relationship was born out of Sarah's desire to save Gabriel and his amazement that anyone would want to be with him. Perhaps you have to read to the end of the book to get the author's full vision for the two of them but I did not buy that there was a genuine connection. Secondly, they're separated for ages after their declarations of love. I didn't stick around to see them reunite but by the 66% mark it had ceased to feel like a romance novel and became the Gabriel show.

I've read some James before and had the same basic issues with her writing and sex scenes. She's not my cup of tea.

Maqluba says

I love a good cathartic story like this one. You've got a thoroughly abused hero and a very original heroine who doesn't play by the rules. The best part? they TALK to each other...that's right! a historical romance where the hero and heroine actually talk about their feelings and don't hide away or reject how they feel, it's miracle! He has such a messed up history and more crap just keeps happening to him, poor guy... you just wanna hold him and let him cry on your shoulders (which the heroine liked to do too:)

I was a little annoyed with the random time jumps here and there so quickly (especially in the beginning), and I wished the heroine wasn't soooo carefree about things (I get she's supposed to be the 'Gypsy widow' but really it went too far sometimes).

I do appreciate the author's historic info (I honestly don't know how much is true, but I appreciate that she made us aware of it and not swept off to the side).

Zoe says

I think Judith James writes with a very distinctive style, which makes her stories very interesting for me. It can be a little trying to follow though. I find it interesting all the same. Whether I love it, I cannot say. But it certainly makes interesting reads.

Broken Wing has a man whore for a hero. I have seen quite a few courtesan books but this is my first book which has the male lead cast as a male prostitute at the time when the story begins. I did not know what to expect so I read on with a certain level of anticipation.

I think 3 things bothered me:

1. Gabriel's inferiority complex: it is only normal that he felt he was not worthy of Sarah. I understand that. I don't always need an alpha hero to like the book. But I do want to see that the characters not pity themselves.

When the characters are so harsh on themselves to the point where they exhibit self-pity.....I have trouble holding respect for them. Speaking of a beta hero who I love, Harry from *The Leopard Prince*, is a servant in love with the lady of the manor, his employer, no less. But you never, ever, feel that he felt he was really beneath her. Yeah he felt the differences in their social classes, he recognized that she was out of his league. But he did not pity himself or whine about how he did not "deserve" her. Maybe I am too harsh on Gabriel, but I am never one for pity party.

2. Sarah's "wild behaviors": she considered herself unmarriagable. So she enjoyed her freedom, wearing men clothes. That immediately turns me off. I like my girls girly. I have trouble liking heroines who are too "wild". Unconventional, ok, but not feminine, no go. I could not see Sarah as the lady that she was supposed to be. She sounded more like a young lad than a lady.

3. The plots: Like other reviewers have said, Gabriel and Sarah were separated for a LONG time in this book. Gabriel went on the ship to make a life for himself. I get that. I think it is important too. It is just About 70% of the book is spent on first, getting Gabriel to Sarah's house so that they could get to know each other and second, getting Gabriel to "find a place for himself" to be worthy of Sarah. Where is the romance? I imagine this was necessary for the story, which means, this is probably not my kind of story.

Mollie says

This book first appeared on my radar way back when Kristie(j) posted her review then her subsequent quest to get EVERYONE to read it, much like her *North & South* crusade! I don't know why I didn't read this sooner. Kristie hasn't steered me wrong yet between *Ride the Fire*, *North & South*, and the Joss Ware Envy series; I should know by now to read everything Kristie tells me!

I don't know that there's a lot for me to add with all of the amazing reviews of *Broken Wing* but if you're a girl who loves a tortured hero, they don't make 'em much more tortured than Gabriel St. Croix.

This is one seriously damaged soul, so drawn into himself, having experienced nothing at all of love, he can't imagine anyone expressing any kindness towards him. His perceptions of people's actions and intentions toward him are so skewed, your heart just breaks for him. Especially when Sarah says or acts out of complete kindness or generosity and he immediately assumes the worst and often lashes out unnecessarily.

You might think, as a reader, that this would grate on your nerves however, I think it's an accurate representation of the psychological and emotional damage that people who suffer the kind of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that Gabe endured.

While Gabriel has serious issues and the book deals with some disturbing content, I think James does an excellent job of giving the reader just enough information regarding Gabe's past without crossing a line into gratuitous descriptions of his abuse.

Sarah is an excellent heroine, almost too perfect in my opinion though. She's so forgiving and understanding and always manages to react to Gabe's outbursts with the perfect amount of patience and sympathy. She's exactly the type of woman Gabriel needs, however she just seems *so* perfect it would have been nice if she had some flaws!

This is definitely a hero centric story, there is a large chunk of the story where Gabriel and Sarah are separated but if you're like me and enjoy a good tortured hero, no doubt you'll fall in love with Gabriel! You HAVE to pick up *Broken Wing*. I love it!

Kristie, consider me a Questor!

Verity says

3.5 STARS

I dunno what to make of this book. The romance dept was so lacking that I was tempted to rate it lower. I do give JJ credit for originality, but "The chronicles of Gabriel's miserable life" woulda been a more apt title. I don't mind long separations as long as the pay-off in the end makes me go ooh & aah, but in this case, the HEA felt like the author was made aware that the deadline was just around the corner, so she wrapped it up @ a rapid 'blink & U'll miss' speed. He makes a big fuzz 'bout not wanting to be an eternal shameless freeloader, he's eager to earn his own dough, but then WTF, he chickens out in the end. He doesn't have the b@ll\$ to face her. He thinks his chance @ luv is shot to hell. Well, I couldn't fathom why he felt tainted. After all the grisly trials & tribulations he's gone thru', U'd think he'll do whatever it takes, @ least make a conscious effort to move heaven & earth to be w/ his wife again. Doesn't it defeat the purpose of the 145 pages of separation ? Gabriel's self-flogging was overabundant. I didn't fall for his sob "I'm a victim" story, I thought he was a tad immature (@ times he acts like a surly, ungrateful teenager who drifts thru' life w/ no sense of purpose) & too emotionally stunted to have a real long-lasting relationship. Batman's own Rachel has a corny but memorable quote : "It's not who U are underneath. It's what U do that defines U." Gabriel prolly thinks it's a policy he should adhere to, 'cuz obviously he feels the sum of his worth is defined by his bloody acts, thus his feeling of unworthiness. Gimme a break =^2 Sarah has given him a taste of heaven. She opens her heart, her house, her chunky family coffers & yez, most crucially, her pearly gates of heaven. She waits for him for over 2 freakin' long years. She has proven that she has an unlimited capacity for sympathy & accepting him the way he is, slit wrists & all. Instead of rushing to her arms, he condemns himself to a lifetime of unhappiness. There's lotsa telling & not enuff showing. The plot of 'Highland rebel' meanders @ times, hence the more lackadaisical pace. In comparison, BW is less hefty but suffers from a meandering hero. I enjoyed the 2ndary characters' (Davey = Sarah's cousin / Gabriel's mentor, Ross = Sarah's over-protective bro', Valmont = Gabriel's newfound BFF) & their droll sense of humor. I also liked it when Gabriel turned into a cold-blooded, take-no-prisoners killing machine in the name of revenge & delivered the kiss of death. 1 chapter of his life is closed as the villain gets his comeuppance. Relentless physical battery aside, the book has its highlights, but unfortunately Sarah is relegated to the corner of the storyboard as a mental prop. If Gabriel's rambling luv letters were supposed to be the barometer of his esteem for Sarah, she coulda lived w/out 'em. For once, actions should speak more eloquently than words. For all his boasting & jeering, his luvmaking is 1-dimensional. Why not let his much-touted talents do the talking ? If this book is a showcase for human's resilience in the face of 1 horrific event after another, JJ has succeeded, but I prefer a tortured hero w/ more layers, who gives more than he takes. He woulda endeared himself more if he'd groveled, after putting Sarah thru' years of worrying & loneliness. Even after the saccharine-sweet HEA, he still needed lifelong therapy. I betcha my glorious crown that anytime the family piggy bank runs dry, he'll run off again to make ends meet, then feel unworthy of her & no amount of Sarah's unconditional luv, caring & affection will ever be enuff to heal his wounded soul. "Gabriel" seems to be the go-to hero's name for any books featuring fallen angels. So I guess I'm no bleeding heart 'cuz he broke her heart, it was a slap in Sarah's face when he didn't bend over backwards or crawl on broken shields for being MIA while she ate her heart out for her cynical hubby, esp when she's only a stone's throw away. I almost wished she'd hook

up w/ Killigrew, 'cuz he injects a bit of fun in her otherwise-dreary life.

Giedre says

DNF at 20%

Writing too adjective heavy. Character development seems to be anaemic. I also encountered this gem of a sentence: *He sprang erect at her touch, his manhood hungry and bold*. If you're wondering what exactly she touched, it was not his nether regions, unless those bits are masquerading as his forearm. Anyway, I couldn't take this book seriously afterwards, so I decided not to wait for an actual sex scene, because I just bet there'll be at least one instance of *turgid* there.

MelissaB says

Broken Wing was a very good book that kept me turning the pages. The writing style is different than most romances, I felt a little more removed from the characters than normal but it did not take away from my enjoyment of the story. There was a historical fiction feel to the story but there is also a very good romance being told.

Sarah Monroe and her brother travel to France to bring home her younger brother who disappeared five years ago but was recently found in a brothel. They find him relatively unharmed thanks to the protection of Gabriel St. Croix, a very jaded male prostitute who was sold to the Madam as a young boy and has been unable to escape. Sarah insists on Gabriel being released and brought home to Cornwall with them since he saved her younger brother from great harm. Gabriel had all hope burnt out of him at a young age and doesn't know what to do with his newfound freedom. He is afraid to believe that he is finally free to live and has no idea what to do with that freedom.

Gabriel settles into their house in Cornwall as a paid companion to the younger brother but has trouble assimilating into a normal life. He has been taught his only value is his body and what he can do with it but Sarah strives to bring out the sensitive man who was buried inside. Gabriel and Sarah have a great connection that grows as she slowly brings him out of his shell with the help of her brother and cousin. The couple fall in love over a long period of time which made it believable despite Gabriel's horrible past. They had to deal with a lot of his emotional issues related to his treatment at the hands of others but slowly were able to overcome them.

After they fall in love there was a turning point to the story where Gabriel was separated from Sarah and had to endure even more trials. While it was hard to read about this poor guy enduring even more in his life, this part of the book was also interesting. I am not a fan of separations in my romance but the author was able to write this section well. The locations moved to Northern Africa, which is a very interesting place during the early 1800's. The ending was good and heart-wrenching but I would have enjoyed a little more detail to the story after the couple was reunited.

Overall, this was a very good historical romance. The romance aspect was sweet and endearing, I really enjoyed Gabriel and Sarah as a couple. Sarah was a wonderful heroine, I love how she believed in Gabriel

from the beginning and always fought for him. My heart broke for the pain Gabriel endured during his life but he was able to become a good man despite everything.

Read this book if you want to read a good story that tells of how love can conquer over hardship and pain. Also read this if you want a historical romance that is a bit different than most of the others – in a good way.

Feminista says

[
But I don't understand where the author was trying to go with Gabriel's voluntary one year exile. After all Sarah and her family had done for him, after Sarah and Gabriel got MARRIED, he stayed away from her when he could have been home one year earlier! She was mourning him still!

The author makes it out to be that he was ashamed for murdering his childhood abuser. But I just wanted him to stand up for Sarah and their relationship for o

Caroline The HEA Lover says

*(This was originally posted on **Book Lovers Inc**)*

Warning this might be the longest review ever...I promise to wake you up when I'm done. Oh and it might be a little tiny bit spoilery, but I'll keep it as vague as I can!

It took me a while to finish this book. Why? Because halfway through it I had the strange thought 'Ah, if it ended there it would be a HEA...could be nice!'...after that I had a hard time picking it up again not knowing what drama was going to ruin it all! (but it always does, you know!) Lol But let's start at the beginning...

We meet Gabriel at a brothel in France, broken inside, desperate at the idea that the little lost boy he's been protecting for years will soon go back with his family who is coming to take him back. This is the kind of hero I love, tortured and broken hero! He's been through hell since he was abandoned as a babe in the street. Ever since he's been living in a brothel and contrary to the little boy he protected, Gabriel has been a whore since childhood...no one was there to protect him. My heart was breaking when I saw how desperate he was, in the last 5 years, the little boy was the only reason he had to live. There are a few scenes where he cut himself to feel alive, heart-wrenching I tell ya! (Look at the bandage on his arms on the cover!)

Sarah has been looking for her little brother since he disappeared, when she hears he's been in a brothel for 5 years she is afraid of the worst. She's coming to Paris to take him back, she never thought she would have to take his protector with him, but the little boy won't leave without him. They agreed that he could work as a companion to the boy for a year and come back with them to England. For the first half of the book, Gabriel will slowly come back to life, he's learning to trust again and he's fighting his own demons.

Sarah is known as the Gypsy Countess, she left her husband 5 days after her (arranged) wedding, started wearing pants and embarked with her pirate of a cousin on his ship to find her brother. She is happy this way,

she doesn't care what people think of her, she will still dress like a man and do whatever she wants. (that's my girl!)

It felt like a standard Historical romance, a really good one! I loved how the heroes fell for each other gradually. Sarah didn't throw herself at Gabriel, she tried for months to help him feel at home, she became his friend. Did I tell you that Gabriel is gorgeous? Well I am telling you now! Friendship slowly turned into love...but then it had to end! Bahhhh

The second part of the book, is an adventure! Sarah's cousin has been training Gabriel to become a 'privateer' so he could have a living. This is where things change...Gabriel wants Sarah but he feels that he needs to make a fortune for himself to deserve her. So he leaves on a mission... It felt like 2 different books, I didn't say I didn't like the 2 parts though! It's just that this was a complete different story, we embark on an adventure with pirates, slavers, murders...we follow Gabriel in many countries. I won't tell you what happens but let's say poor Gabriel is not very lucky. We only see Sarah again nearing the end, years later. This part was mostly about Gabriel. This is something different from usual Historical Romances, we don't know what Sarah is doing, we're following the hero.

Of course when you'll see the rating I gave this book you'll guess how this book ends *wink*. This was an amazing book, I just wish I had not felt like stopping halfway through it. The heroes and secondary characters are adorable, I laughed a lot with le Chevalier, he's pretty funny and it helped lifting my spirits when the book started to become very depressing.

All in all (because it seems I can't write a review without saying that, go figure!) it is a great book... it is a mix of historical romance and adventure with a great cast of characters! It's nothing I've read before and It's going on my keeper shelf!

Kristiej says

Gabriel is a young man living in complete despair. Since he was given as a very young boy to a French brothel, he has been used – terribly so. Hauntingly so. Heartbreakingly so. The only thing that keeps him going, that keeps him there, is the protection he is giving to a young boy, Jamie. He is terrified that the same thing will be done to the Jamie that was done to him. When he finds out the family, a brother and sister, of Jamie have discovered his whereabouts after years of searching for him, Gabriel knows it's his time to escape – except he has no where to go. The brothel is all he has known. So when young Jamie refuses to go with this family he barely remembers unless his friend Gabriel accompanies him back to England, his older brother and sister agree, and Gabriel has a place to go. But he's not happy. Gabriel doesn't feel worthy. He sees himself a whore and is just waiting for either Ross or Sarah, Jamie's brother or sister to make a move on him. But Sarah senses there is something worthwhile underneath his hard shell. And slowly, and angrily Gabriel begins telling her about some of his past, expecting her to be horrified and send him away. But instead Sarah is compassionate and understanding. They slowly, over time, fall in love. And it's beautiful to read. I was close to tears many times.

Sarah is an unconventional heroine. Married against her will at a young age to an old rake, she does the unthinkable and leaves him. He later dies but she is ostracized from polite society. But rather than mourn, she is now liberated to live life the way she wants to. Her brother Ross, supports her, rather than trying to get her to conform. He is very leery of the growing closeness he sees between Sarah and Gabriel since he knows what Gabriel was but he is convinced by a family friend Davey to look beyond the surface of what Gabriel once was and try and see what Sarah sees.

Now in most romances this would signal the end of the book, but not so in this case. Instead in Broken Wing, Gabriel leaves with Davey, a privateer, to try and make his fortune so he can support Sarah. What follows is all Gabriel's story and his descent back into his personal hell but always with Sarah in his heart. My heart ached, and I mean really and truly ACHED during this part for all that Gabriel suffers and all that he goes through.

As I said, I wish I could give this more than 5 stars as it is a book that deeply moved me with it's story of an all conquering love.

MomToKippy says

This is interesting romantic historical fiction interspersed with smut or smut interspersed with interesting historical fiction. I do not get the reviews that indicate this is your traditional romantic historical. Egads no. I would recommend Kinsale or McNaught for authors who need lessons on artistically described romantic interludes. Ok, I need to go wash my eyeballs out...

Regan Walker says

Set in the late 1700s/early 1800s in France and England with stops in the Mediterranean and North Africa, this story is rich in the history of the times and will sweep you away with an enthralling story of love, hardship, inner strength, forgiveness, acceptance and the joy of life. I think the heroine may be my favorite of all time: beautiful, intelligent, creative—a rebel with a past. But the hero, Gabriel, is to die for. You will love him, I promise. (They are both on my Favorite Heroes & Heroines list on my Regan's Romance Reviews blog.)

The story begins in Paris where a young boy, Gabriel, is left at a brothel, raised to pleasure both men and women. We learn in backstory that he was sold to a sick aristocrat, who educated the handsome boy and taught him music at which he excels. But when Gabriel tried to escape he was "disciplined" and returned to the brothel.

Years later, having become most attractive to both men and women, and one of the brothel's most prized possessions, Gabriel so hates himself he cuts his arms to remind himself he is alive. He has only one thing keeping him there...he saves another boy from ending up like him, protecting young Jamie against any who would rob the child of his innocence. As it turns out, Jamie is the young brother of an English nobleman who learns where the boy is and comes for him. With the nobleman comes his sister, Sarah, Lady Munroe, known as "the Gypsy Countess."

Sarah is a most unusual woman who thinks more like a man and often dresses like one. Thankful for Gabriel's protection of the boy, she and her brother contract with Gabriel to return with them to England for a year to help settle Jamie. During that time, the family comes to appreciate Gabriel's honorable nature, his intelligence and his character. Sarah, who can see into Gabriel's soul, longs to heal his many hurts. In the process, she and Gabriel share a love for the night sky, music and the ocean. And Sarah and Gabriel fall deeply in love.

Gabriel, who has trained as a seaman and a swordsman, decides to go with Sarah's cousin, Davey, a privateer captain, to the Mediterranean in order to earn enough money to one day support Sarah. And here a real

adventure begins.

James is meticulous in detail and the historical setting is rich, accurate and absorbing. She tells the tale through many perspectives and I found that refreshing. I loved knowing what all the characters were thinking and she did it very well. The characters are well developed and varied. You will love Davey the pirate/privateer, Ross the older brother who is a pirate at heart...and so many others along the way.

I highly recommend this one. It's a keeper.

Emery Lee says

Judith James weaves a dark and compelling spell in *Broken Wing*, the story of a seemingly irredeemable man, a former male prostitute raised in a Parisian brothel, who through self-sacrifice for another is able to escape his life and find his soul.

Although this did feel like two books in one, I loved the multiple settings and "pirate adventure" that gave Gabriel his final chance for revenge and desperately needed closure.

Gabriel's ultimate redemption, however, is only found in the arms of Sarah, an unconventional woman who through strength of character, unfailing compassion, and forgiveness, is able to teach him to truly love.

A great read for lovers of darker romance, tortured heroes and unconventional heroines. Four and a half stars!

????α [Punya Reviews...] says

My review contains spoilers and they're mostly my thoughts as I went with the book...

This debut book by Judith James is by no means formulaic. I've read many of those in my long years of Romance reading and while I loved some of them to bits, others bored me to death. I totally appreciated the storyline of *Broken Wing*, the historical research JJ obviously done so well and created someone like Gabriel; a man you can't just NOT adore, love and respect, even though his past was every bit sordid. Varying bunch of emotions gripped me while I was reading it: laughter, tears, shock, dread... I felt I myself was being tortured with Gabriel. But overall, I wasn't bored once and I wasn't disappointed, which is where I can truly say that I'm glad that I've read this book.

Before I continue with my review, first a few things that bugged me:

- 1)Somewhat stilted dialogues at times. Didn't always correspond the actions of the characters correctly IMO. Same goes for the prose structure. But JJ's writing grew on me gradually and I really didn't have much trouble getting into the book later. The story was very intense and intriguing; the Historical notations were very interesting so I was more focused on those. I didn't mind it as much as some reviewers did and vehemently ditched the book on the basis of it.
- 2)Sudden POV shifting. This bugged me a bit but I waded through.
- 3)The time frame all through the book was the biggest problem. I wish JJ gave us the exact time-frame, years

passing in between. Would've been really convenient.

4) The protagonists' respective ages. Those were very confusing too.

The story starts with a disillusioned Gabriel trying to connect himself with the outer world, sitting on the rooftop of the Parisian brothel where he was abandoned as a young child. He never knew his parents and there was no one who cared for him. Gabriel has never known a little bit of love. No one ever wanted him unless it's his beautiful face and body. No one was there to rescue him when he needed to be rescued. My heart lurched from that moment, when I found him cutting his wrist and smiling jadedly, just to see if he's alive. He grew up there and as a pretty child, caught lecherous attentions of some dirty SOBs. One, de Seigny, bought Gabriel from the madame when he was 14 and forcibly converted him. I feel sick when I think of it; Gabriel was so young and he was made to do things he had no notion about. For about two years, he suffered through this. De Seigny kept him as a page boy and taught him to read, write, sing, play various musical instruments, riding... most of it to amuse himself when he needed it. He also taught Gabriel things to pleasure him. Gabriel went with it, not knowing the right or wrong and took part in his own ruination (as he tells Sarah in one scene). One day, he ran away. When de Seigny found him, he tortured him and then passed him on to his other cronies. I can't tell you how utterly horrible I found it all and felt so much for the poor babe. The trauma of it never left Gabriel. And then he was back at his 'home', the only home he'd ever known, to become a trained prostitute who can pleasure both men and women. He lived his life, doing things many of us can't even imagine and resigned to it. When Jamie was brought in here, somehow Gabriel found a purpose of his ruined, damaged life. He kept the little boy alive and safe from the dirty environment of the brothel. Jamie was a pretty child and Gabriel knew from his own experience what is awaiting him in the future. As Jamie grew up, he once saved him from a lecher and killed that man. It was an involuntary action, born out of his hatred and darkness, of which he was a part of. Then, after 5 long years, Jamie's family found him and was coming to take him away. Gabriel doesn't know how he'll go on when this one little and innocent purpose of his life goes away.

Sarah is called the *Gypsy Countess* because of her unconventional ways and looks, inherited from her Roma ancestors. She was married at a very young age, forcibly, to a man old enough to be her grandfather. After her parents died, Sarah's evil uncle became her guardian. Her older half-brother Ross was serving in the military so he wasn't around to help her or a young Jamie. Because Sarah's mother descended from Roma ancestry, her uncle couldn't stand her or even Jamie. Jamie was kidnapped and then sold and somehow landed in that brothel, of which no one knew until now. Sarah left her husband just about a week after her marriage, causing a lot of talk and scandal. The man died soon after, leaving her a rich widow. Then one of their distant cousins, Davey joined her, who is of Huguenot descendant. Davey or *Gypsy Davey*, as he's called, is a wild adventurer. He is older than both Sarah and Ross but he's closer to both of them. But when Davey came into her life, Ross wasn't here. So he and Sarah formed a strong bond. Sarah was frantically looking for Jamie at that point and without luck, she joined Davey's pirate ship and spent two years touring with him. Ross came back, took back what was his and hired men to look for Jamie. Their estate borders on a sea shore, nestled against a cliff, with the backdrop of sea and the beach down below, so it wasn't a big problem for Davey to anchor closer to the house. Afterwards, Ross also would join Davey in his adventures. Davey is a charming pirate, hungry for the finer things in life; be it riches or women. And he appreciates both, takes whatever life presents him with. I did like Davey a lot; his piraty dark good looks, quick wit and charm (minus the womanizing, that I can live without knowing) was very appreciable. And it was pretty obvious that he has a deeper affection for Sarah. He appreciates the strong and vivacious woman she is. Ross was a character I didn't know well, as I felt it. He was a bit pompous but an essentially good man. Still, we don't really know much of his life outside this estate or whatever he does whenever he was 'on business' in London.

Now that they have found Jamie in a brothel, both Ross and Sarah are much tensed about this and the

changes this might wrought in their younger brother. They travel to Paris, only to be surprised again and again. First off, they find Jamie visibly healthy; both in body and mind. He's doesn't recognize them but he would leave with them, only if Gabriel accompanies him. Both siblings are perplexed by this demand. Then, on Jamie's insistent, they meet the male prostitute. One look at Gabriel and his surly demeanor (with dark good looks), Sarah can't help feel attracted. On her argument and much insistent, Ross gives in.

Gabriel didn't at all think that Jamie's family would want to meet him but this grows weirder by the minute. When Ross proposes him to come with them as Jamie's paid companion, he's instantly suspicious. He acts hostile, with sharp words and innuendos. But Sarah has already caught his eyes and the money sounded lucrative. With a year-long deal, they make the madame relieve Gabriel of all his duties. Through their travel to England, Sarah tries to make friends with Gabriel but he won't open up. Sarah knew that it won't be easy but there is something about him, almost hauntingly sad, makes her reach out to him. If only she knew how to do that! After they're in England, all settle down. Even Jamie, after sometimes, shows great potentials and it was very apparent that he has suffered no bad effects, thanks to Gabriel. But, it's the man in question who can't settle himself down. Gabriel might've given up his job but the nightmares of the brothel and what he suffered at de Seigny's hands haunt him at night. He can't sleep well and drinks much. Even though he does his duty by Jamie, he feels he doesn't fit into the family. His lacking self-worth and depression was clearly visible and saddened me. Sarah tried more than once but thankfully she never gave up, even when he was being rude. They kiss once or twice and Sarah knows he wants the man. But she also knows that Gabriel won't appreciate her pawing, like many other women (or men) of his past. After a few months, Gabriel starts loosening up though. It was a big step when Sarah invited him to her balcony at night for sky watching with telescope. Gabriel thought she had an assignation in mind. Oddly, it disappointed him but he was willing to accommodate because he wanted her too. He was proven wrong soon after. After this, their relationship improves noticeably and Gabriel was communicating more and more with her. There's also a shared love of music between them. Gabriel would climb up the big Oak tree that sides her balcony and to her chamber; sometimes to chat with her, sometimes to escape his nightmares and wallow himself into drinks.

Ross was pretty suspicious of Gabriel but he proved all of it wrong. He didn't engage in any sort of debauchery while residing with them. Gabriel was celibate. After all he went through, sex wasn't the topmost thing on his mind. Meanwhile, Davey's ship anchors. Gabriel was already curious to know this man of whom everyone talks about and very highly. After a little shaky start, he gave into Davey's personality. He always had an interest in the ocean and Davey, after some talks with Ross, was willing to show him around his ship. Gabriel jumps to the chance, training under Davey on his ship. He didn't know that Ross or Sarah didn't want him gone anymore but Ross was planning for something that would improve his life and it isn't 'privateering', as Davey likes to call it. But nothing can thwart Gabriel's interest to work as a sailor and in Sarah. This training gave him some purpose of life and Sarah's company made him dream. They were becoming closer and it was a lure that Gabriel couldn't deny. He was madly in love already. I loved the scenes where Sarah 'teaches' Gabriel to kiss, since his job didn't really require kissing. Then there were scenes as Sarah coaxes confessions out of Gabriel, where he can't but talk about the darkest, dirties aspects of his past. He was always welcomed in her room at night. She made her window seat exclusive for Gabriel, keeping his comfort in mind. I really enjoyed reading these scenes and yet felt sad again and again how Gabriel felt torn into giving in and fought because he couldn't believe that a woman like Sarah would want ever him. But Sarah wasn't just another woman! Once Sarah finds out about his wrists and makes him wrist guards. She also sees the whip marks on his back and hips. It upsets Gabriel but Sarah soothes away his fears. And then, one day they just end up making love. Ross wasn't at home, Jamie was somewhere else for his schooling. These two months of their life was like a dream. They become engaged and would marry soon.

But Gabriel wants to make money. He won't live off his wife, it's as simple as that. Soon Ross is home but

not at all happy to find the former prostitute fondling his sister. He berates Gabriel. Later, Gabriel talks to Davey about his plan and the pirate agrees. He was very fond of Gabriel already. Sarah isn't very happy about it but she knows she can't thwart him. Gabriel sails without saying goodbye but can't stay away because he felt guilty of hurting Sarah. One night, Davey plans something. Gabriel comes back and proposes to Sarah. She is very surprised and happy; they marry secretly and spend a blissful night in the ship. I still didn't know what lies ahead of them or how long they'd be really apart, though Gabriel promises to come back ASAP, maybe within the year.

You can say that from here started the second part of the story. It was full of adventures, but mostly with lost ones, with both bleakness and hope. And Gabriel suffers along with it. His raids with Davey went very well and in a few months, he was rich enough. He learned a lot from Davey and was happily anticipating his return to Sarah. Even though Davey helped himself with women (and more women) everywhere they went, Gabriel missed Sarah and wrote her letters. We see some adventures here, with Davey and the crew, on their raids. But, fate struck Gabriel again and proved herself a fickle b*ch once more. On their way home, a storm was brewing. Gabriel fell off the ship while helping a fellow mate. He was badly injured and unconscious for days when he woke up in a middle-eastern slave ship. It was a putrid situation, both the ship and his luck. Gabriel finds a friend in Jacques, a *chevalier*; unwanted son of a nobleman. He spent his life in adventures, much like Gabriel's own. Jacques has this amazing humor and undeniably easy-going charm. But soon, when they arrive in their destination, Gabriel was delusional with a raging fever from his infections and stays in the infirmary. When he wakes up, he finds Jacques gone, sold to his new master. The people of the infirmary tell him that he has been sold too and would be going to his new master soon. Gabriel wanted to write to home for ransom but he had no scope whatsoever in this foreign land. As he's taken to his new 'home', at first Gabriel thinks maybe it's for the best of give in and wait for a chance. He finds Jacques there, one his own, as his father denied his ransom. Apparently it's been two months already. Gabriel's jubilation of seeing his good friend dies away at night when his nightmares come to haunt him again, this time for real. My stomach dropped... "*Reveille tois, mon ange.*" (wake up, my angel)... think I won't forget this line, so innocuous and yet brought such terror for Gabriel. A dirty hand on his body and he knows it to be no one but de Sevigny. The old bastard is now a rich man and knew it was Gabriel from the description. He is in slave trading and provides pretty boys to men with his own taste. And, apparently he still has a penchant for Gabriel. Jacques is dumbstruck but says nothing when Gabriel plays the besotted lover to de Sevigny and kisses him on his urging. I was shaking literally, feeling the kind of strength he needed to do this, without Sarah to weather his nightmares. But Gabriel had an ultimate plan. When he was taken to the vile bastard's rooms and was alone, Gabriel finally shows him how much he 'loves' him, by gutting him inside out. The kiss and this murder wrought some drastic changes in Gabriel, shadowing the softer side that Sarah unearthed from within. Later he takes whatever he can from de Sevigny's riches, rescues Jacques, killing many guards on their way. Gabriel didn't feel anything but a numbness taking him over.

As they were trying to get out of the city, they meet a band of *renegados*. When the team leader invites them to join, not knowing their real identity, they do. Used to with rough men, these two had no trouble fitting in. They proved to be very useful and the team-leader takes them to their leader, Murad Reis, formerly known as Peter Lisle, a Scotsman in origin. The Reis is happy to take big, strong and good looking Jacques in but still thinner from his illness Gabriel had to pass a 'test' of sort. Remember that I've sort of lost track of time here but it was about a yr or so after Gabriel sailed from England. Under the Reis, they worked as hired mercenary, killing for whoever paid them. About 2 more yrs pass by without any luck on escaping. Jacques proved to be quite the womanizer (dimming much of my enthusiasm about him). Only the fact that he genuinely cared for Gabriel and was with him through all these kept me intrigued. Nightmares still haunted Gabriel but he was still celibate, still hoping to see Sarah someday. But outwardly, he convinces himself that after this life, he can't go back to Sarah anymore. One day, on Reis's pirate ship, they find a chance of escaping. The escape plan was well organized, loved reading those scenes. They land in Paris where they

lived a life full of debauchery, with gambling, drinking and whoring. At least the first two was correct for Gabriel and all three for Jacques, who was shagging left and right. Since he didn't know about Sarah, Jacques was confused as to why Gabriel doesn't show interest in either women or men. One day, Gabriel grows tired of all these and asks Jacques to sail to England. He definitely wanted Sarah to find him out but Gabriel thought she'd probably moved on and is married by now.

But for the last two years, Sarah hadn't moved on. She was still holding to the promise they made when they parted, of waiting for one another as long as it takes. She sometimes can't really believe that Gabriel is gone forever but she couldn't give up. On Ross's pressure, Sarah finally decides to find life again. She makes some plans, for the coming the Christmas and one concerning horse breeding. Ross sends Sarah, alone, to this infamous libertine, Foul...oops Falmouth, to talk about his studs. She meets him while he was having an orgy in his house, comes out drunk with his mistress, fondling the woman shamelessly in front of her. I was so dumbfounded, at first thinking how could Ross send Sarah to this lecherous goat? Then, when Sarah begins to enjoy Falmouth's false charms, finding him amusing and even let him kiss her once with the intentions of taking it further, I was royally pissed. I mean, really Sarah? Let me assure you that this man had not one good intention towards her whatsoever, even though she was his friend's sister, her widow status notwithstanding. He at first wanted her as a few days of diversion and then, when he finds he likes her, as his mistress. It disturbed the hell outta me that Sarah was so deliberately blind! Anyway, trouble happens when Sarah couldn't put Gabriel out of her mind to take it further. Still, she definitely disappointed me here.

When Gabriel and Jacques come back to England and settle closer to Ross's townhouse (where Sarah was at that moment), their lives were an extension of what they lived in France, maybe even more debauched. We get to see Jacques's indiscretions all over the place (made me gag for sure). He just doesn't care whom he f*cks as long as it's a loose woman. But Gabriel *sigh*, he stays celibate. Soon he begins to grow restless, knowing Sarah is so close and yet so far away. Even though he's cool about everything around him, men and women alike won't stop fawning over him. With a lot of annoyance, Gabriel hatches a plan to thwart unwanted attentions; something at first shocked and disappointed me, not knowing the truth behind it. I won't reveal it since it made the ending all the more appealing.

Yes, that ending was worth more than anything. The scene where finally Sarah and Gabriel come together, opening up about their lost hopes and frustrations, sad times missing one another and the love that never left them. What a scene! Totally loved the words they shared, especially Gabriel to Sarah... I was a melting puddle of tears and wanted to grab and kiss him hard. *sigh* It made me cry for sure. Overall, even though there were glitches and I thought Gabriel and Sarah were kept apart too long for my liking, I appreciated Gabriel's journey of life and his fights to stay strong. He gets a 5 star alone. It was beautiful, with both darkness and the light. Someday, I hope, JJ would give Davey and Jacques their books because these two need to be brought down to the ground by two fiery ladies. I'm rating this book a 4.5 star gladly.
