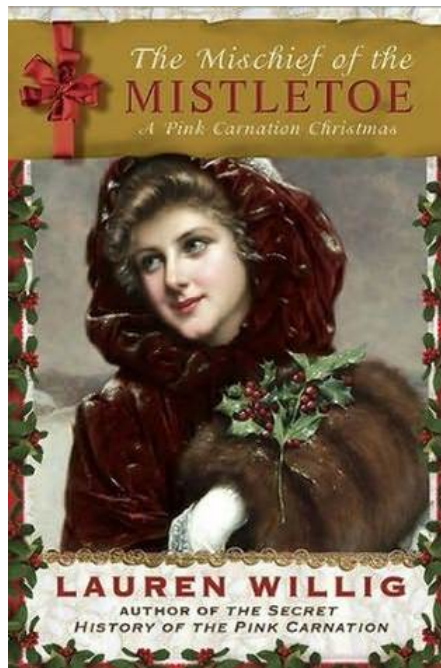




The Mischief of the Mistletoe

Lauren Willig

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The Mischief of the Mistletoe Lauren Willig

Arabella Dempsey's dear friend Jane Austen warned her against teaching. But Miss Climpson's Select Seminary for Young Ladies seems the perfect place for Arabella to claim her independence while keeping an eye on her younger sisters nearby. Just before Christmas, she accepts a position at the quiet girls' school in Bath, expecting to face nothing more exciting than conducting the annual Christmas recital. She hardly imagines coming face to face with French aristocrats and international spies...

Reginald "Turnip" Fitzhugh—often mistaken for the elusive spy known as the Pink Carnation—has blundered into danger before. But when he blunders into Miss Arabella Dempsey, it never occurs to him that she might be trouble. When Turnip and Arabella stumble upon a beautifully wrapped Christmas pudding with a cryptic message written in French, "Meet me at Farley Castle", the unlikely vehicle for intrigue launches the pair on a Yuletide adventure that ranges from the Austens' modest drawing room to the awe-inspiring estate of the Dukes of Dovedale, where the Dowager Duchess is hosting the most anticipated event of the year: an elaborate 12-day Christmas celebration. Will they find poinsettias or peril, dancing or danger? And is it possible that the fate of the British Empire rests in Arabella and Turnip's hands, in the form of a festive Christmas pudding?

The Mischief of the Mistletoe Details

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From Reader Review The Mischief of the Mistletoe for online ebook

Kelly says

La! What fun I've had reading this weekend! Or should I say, "fa la la la la," since the book I've just finished reading is Christmas-themed?

Long-time readers know that I am a huge fan of the *Pink Carnation* books, commencing with *The Secret History of the Pink Carnation* and progressing through *The Betrayal of the Blood Lily*. The books, for those not yet familiar with them, are a combination of modern-day romance involving Eloise Kelly and Colin Selwick (moving slowly across the course of the series) and a string of Regency romances involving a variety of French and English spies, many of whom have floral names (from the Purple Gentian to the Pink Carnation to the Black Tulip to the Moonflower). They are light-hearted yet still compelling, tend to include a large number of allusions to Shakespeare, Elizabethan poetry and other literature popular during the Regency era, and tend to be well-researched and well-written.

The Mischief of the Mistletoe is set entirely in Regency times, with no mention whatsoever of Eloise and/or Colin, in part because Willig has set it in a time period she's already covered - sometime between the end of *The Seduction of the Crimson Rose*, and immediately prior to (and slightly overlapping in a *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* kind of way) with the very beginning of *The Temptation of the Night Jasmine*, meaning that we get a peek at the start of Charlotte's story from the perspective of our main characters in this book: a rather beleaguered Arabella Dempsey (based in premise on the character of Emma Watson from Jane Austen's unfinished novel, *The Watsons*) and Reginald "Turnip" Fitzhugh, first introduced in the second book of the series, *The Masque of the Black Tulip* as a good-natured, good-looking, extremely wealthy man - ordinarily immediate romance hero material, except for his being perceived as bumbling, with poor taste in clothing and a complete lack of mental faculties.

Where Lord Vaughn, the intriguing man who winds up being the reluctant hero of *The Seduction of the Crimson Rose*, is so oblique as to be completely opaque, Turnip Fitzhugh is almost completely transparent. But it turns out that when one spends time and gets to know him, he is not, in fact, the dimmest bulb in the string of heroic lights after all. Where some of the male characters in the series - Vaughn, Miles Dorrington, Richard Selwick and Robert Lansdowne, for example - are able to mask their emotions, at least on occasion, Reggie Fitzhugh simply cannot. He is cheerful and earnest and completely sweet, unless, of course, he is coming to Arabella's defense, in which case he can be quite intimidating. *swoon*

Arabella is the eldest daughter of a widowed vicar, now unable to maintain his parish duties as a result of terrible health. She had been taken under the wing of a wealthy aunt for nearly a decade. It had been expected that her elderly aunt would adopt her and she'd be an heiress; instead, her aunt married a fortune-hunter half her age (and a man who had led Arabella to form a bit of a tendre for him). The book opens with Arabella telling her good friend, Miss Jane Austen, about her plans to work at a local boarding school for young ladies - something Arabella prefers to returning to live with her aunt and her new "uncle", or to living in the cramped quarters with her father and three younger sisters. Jane Austen decides to write about Arabella's story, renaming Arabella "Emma Watson". (Janeites will be delighted with the happy fictional reason provided for Austen's abandonment of *The Watsons*, which is so preferable to the raft of decidedly dour propositions that are generally put forth.)

Turnip and Arabella meet because his younger sister, Sally, is a student at the school where Arabella is to teach - as are the younger sisters of Alex and Jack Reid (from *Blood Lily*) and Jane Wooliston (from *Pink Carnation*) - in a story line that involves several Christmas puddings, a notebook, a trellis, a Christmas pageant, and a party at a country house. It is entirely charming and engaging, and also very PG-rated (not

always the case with Willig's books). I find it charming, witty, clever and, occasionally, hilarious. And so, I suspect, will you.

Kendra says

I have to admire Lauren Willig's ability to take side characters that, on the surface, don't seem to be leading role material and make you absolutely love them (or love to hate them) while staying completely true to their already established selves. I was a little wary, to say the least, when I heard Turnip would be the hero of *The Mischief of the Mistletoe*. I've always found him to be hilarious, with his over-the-top pink carnation adorned waistcoats and all, but he seemed better suited to occasional comic relief.

It only took about two pages before I was absolutely in love with him, though. In love as in doodling-Mrs.-Turnip-Fitzhugh on my notebook in love. Bumbling he may be, but he's actually quite bright where it counts, and he's so genuinely sweet and caring you can't help but adore him. Arabella was a perfect compliment to his personality - bright enough to balance his not-so-intelligent moments, but observant enough to see beyond the silly clothes and doltish behavior and appreciate him as he should be appreciated.

I loved the addition of Jane Austen as a character (*The Watsons* serves as some of the basis for this novel) and she was written in well, without distracting from the tone or character of the series. The banter between Arabella, Turnip and others was entertaining enough that I laughed out loud a great deal, probably frightening my fellow airline passengers. It was the perfect holiday story for a trip home after the Thanksgiving holiday.

In short, Turnip has officially challenged Miles for the first place slot of my favorite hero of this series. Since they're both avid boxers, I'd like to see them duke this one out. In knee breeches. Preferably shirtless.

Paige says

This is one of my favorite books and it is part of one of my all-time favorite series. I fall in love with this story, and especially Arabella and Turnip, each time I read it. Turnip really is the hero's nickname, and he turns out to be perhaps one of the most heroic, romantic, loveable, and swoon-worthiest heroes of all.

This is delightful, and despite the fun completely touches my heart. I find myself laughing, swooning, and shedding tears throughout. This glorious story turns out to be what the world needed, and includes Christmas pudding as a projectile weapon, spies, and Jane Austen as a secondary character. This could be read as a standalone. I also recommend the audio book.

Mela says

Turning to Turnip, Miss Dempsey said, "Do you think?" "As little as I can," Turnip replied honestly.

QNPoohBear! You were right. **I also nearly died laughing.** And Turnip was such a dear, such charming beta hero. It was much better (thanks to a more humorous narration) than the first part of series, *The Secret History of the Pink Carnation*. I am even tempted to try other parts (although after first part I have decided to

not do it).

About a Christmas play, which students play in: *The big Christmassy thing at which you are expected to sit quietly and clap loudly whenever you see me.*

It was *wildly improbable* (like QNPoohBear wrote) but the wit made a big difference.

Miss Reid! People are not for sitting. --> That scene was so hilarious.

So, it was **funny historical romance, cozy mystery, chick-lit, a young adult novel that will give you a lovely weekend**. You can read it as a standalone book. There is no need to read previous parts of series before this one.

PS QNPoohBear, where can I find the extra wedding night scene you have mentioned?

Laurel says

Righty-ho! Turnip Fitzhugh gets this own book!

In her six previous novels in the bestselling *Pink Carnation* series, Lauren Willig has furnished us with an assortment of dashing heroes thwarting Napoleonic spies while romancing clever heroines. There are your alpha heroes and your beta heroes, but none qualify as a vegetable hero except Reginald “Turnip” Fitzhugh! He is long on looks and short on brains; but it does not signify. From his very first bumbling scene in *The Mischief of the Mistletoe* when he knocks down our heroine Arabella Dempsey and literally, but not figuratively, sweeps her off her feet, he will steal your heart. How our unlikely hero will prove to our practical heroine that he is as honorable as he is lucky in deducing espionage is the charm of this Christmas tale brimming with burlesque comedy and romance.

Set in 1803 Bath, Arabella Dempsey’s dear friend Jane Austen thinks her life would make “an excellent premise for a novel.” She certainly sounds like heroine material. Since her mother’s death at age twelve, Arabella has been living in London with her wealthy Aunt Osborne. More a piece of furniture than a companion, the family had high hopes of her becoming her aunt’s heir until she married Captain Musgrave, a fortune-hunter half her age. Thrown back on her family, Arabella is reunited with her ailing father Rev. Dempsey and her three younger sisters Margaret, Olivia and Lavinia, all living in genteel poverty in Bath. Happily her particular friend Jane and the Austen family are residing nearby offering support and the witty advice that she is famous for.

Realizing that she must earn a living, Arabella is fortunate to obtain a junior instructress position at Miss Climpson’s Select Seminary for Young Ladies in Bath. At school she does not expect to literally bump into Reginald Fitzhugh, “Turnip” to his friends, in the hallway while he was delivering a Christmas hamper to his younger sister Sally. They had met and danced in London. Awkward, tall and shy, Arabella is not a striking beauty, but she is clever and capable. Turnip is amiable and handsome, but not the “brightest loaf in the breadbox.” He does not remember her, but that was par for the course of her career as a wallflower in London.

Their adventure is set into motion by a Christmas pudding and a mysterious note written in French tied around it. Turnip has had some dealings with spies and espionage having once been accused of being the infamous “Pink Carnation” and he is keen to follow the clues and solve the mystery. Arabella is not so sure, but her charges at Miss Climpson’s: Miss Sally Fitzhugh, Miss Agnes Wooliston, Miss Lizzy Reid and the

scandalous Miss Catherine Carruthers are a teenage force of nature and talk a good case. We follow Arabella, Jane and Turnip in a phaeton ride to a frost fair in the picturesque ruins of Farley Castle to encounter more pudding clues placed on stone effigies, experience an hysterical Christmas pageant at Miss Climpson's that goes terribly wrong, more spy evidence, meet a suspicious French language teacher and an equally doubtful Italian music instructor, and travel to Girdings House, the principal seat of the imposing Dowager Duchess of Dovedail for her famous twelve days of Christmas festivities for more antics. Along the way Turnip and Arabella stumble upon clues, save England, and fall in love.

The Mischief of the Mistletoe takes place after *The Seduction of the Crimson Rose* but before *The Temptation of the Night Jasmine* in series order and readers will recognize many characters interlaced in the narrative. I was absolutely delighted in the paring of the kind hearted Turnip, famous for his absurdly embroidered waistcoats and bumbling antics to our sensible and responsible heroine Arabella. Even though Turnip is thought of as the one who is slower on the uptake, he sees what is important and is attracted to wallflower Arabella while she is sidetracked by Christmas puddings, spies and the social chasm she thinks separates them. How they come together (and you know that they will) is a pleasure to discover.

Rivalling the burlesque comedies of Georgette Heyer and the spy thrillers of Baroness Emma Orczy, I can think of no other contemporary author who can handle high comedy, historical accuracy and espionage as brilliantly as Lauren Willig. I hope that her storyline working in Jane Austen and her unfinished novel *The Watsons* will send readers off to discover or re-read the original. That gentle readers is a Christmas present rivaled only by the receipt of this novel. "Righty-ho"

Laurel Ann, Austenprose

Susan in NC says

Dec. 2017 - still a 3.5 star fun, frothy Christmas rereads for me. I needed the laughs!

Dec. 2016 reread - Still a 3-3.5 star fun, frothy Christmas reread with several laugh out loud scenes with witty, sparkling dialogue and two absolutely charming lead characters! Recommended to put you in the Christmas spirit while delivering a clever romp of a mystery as our hero and heroine race to uncover a Napoleonic spy ring operating among the ton in Regency England.

Dec. 10-12, 2015 reread : more like 3-1/2 stars second time around, as I liked it and almost really liked it, a bit sillier and frothier than I remembered, but still a fun, light-hearted Christmas reread. It's my own fault, I just finished Georgette Heyer's "The Quiet Gentleman", so any book, especially another Regency mystery/romance, would suffer by comparison! But it was a breath of fresh air and I'm sure I'll revisit it next year for some holiday cheer, a fun mystery (or maybe I should call it a spy thriller?), and a touching romance between two genuinely kind and good people, Reggie "Turnip" Fitzhugh and Arabella Dempsey.

Dec. 19-21, 2014: This book was so much fun! I'm a huge fan of Georgette Heyer and have collected many of her romance and mystery books over the years for my personal library, and historical mysteries and historical fiction are two of my favorite genres, so I can't imagine how I missed this series - I will definitely look for the rest of Ms. Willig's flower-themed Regency spy romps. If they are all as much fun as this sweet, funny, charming Cinderella story of Arabella Dempsey and Reginald "Turnip" Fitzhugh, I'm in for a treat.

The book was recommended in the Shelf Awareness newsletter as a fun, Christmas-themed read for mystery buffs, along with Heyer's "Envious Casca"; since I hadn't read either and was looking for a light-hearted,

humorous way to finish off my reading challenge, I decided to read both. Good choice on both books - Heyer's dark, dry-as-dust British humor never lets me down, and "Mischief" was a real treat - reminded me of Heyer's Regency romance/mystery romps, just with a more modern flavor. Turnip was kind, delightful, charming, sincere - one of "Nature's golden children" as Arabella observes, maybe not the brightest knife in the drawer but with not an ounce of malice in him; it was especially touching that Turnip often reflected wryly, with no self-pity, about his lack of intellectual prowess in his internal dialogues! Arabella was a very sympathetic heroine, one of my personal favorites types: somewhat non-descript in looks but sensible, funny, warm, smart and resilient - and Jane Austen is her best friend, so she's perfect! Lots of fun and recommended for a Christmas read or just a light, happy, feel-good book.

Miriam says

Verdict: even sillier than normal for this series. On the plus side, I did not hate either of the romantic protagonists, as is so often the case. Most of the leads from her other books wandered pointlessly through the story to remind me of how forgettable they were. The only ones I found memorably hateful were Vaughn and Mary, who had even less excuse for their cameo than some of the other characters'. No, actually the character who had the least reason to be in the story was Jane Austen, weakly shoved in there in what seemed like a blatant attempt to get Austenites to pick up this fluff. Don't: she is a minor and poorly depicted aside. Willig implies that she's read Austen's own correspondence but she certainly doesn't get the tone anywhere close.

I did remember Turnip from his stumbles across the scene in previous books. In this book he reminded me of Heyer's Freddy Standish. He seemed more oblivious than idiotic, although I did not buy that he would be unaware of the social stigma attaching to unmarried women being alone with men. And I wasn't a hundred percent sold on the rapport between him and the much smarter and more educated Arabella. But they were sympathetic and rarely annoyed me, which is saying something for a romance.

And this really was a romance. There was not enough spy action to balance it. Willig is always obviously more interested in her romance than her espionage, but in this case that plot was incredibly weak and implausible. All sorts of people stumbling around a girls' boarding school in the night? Messages via Christmas pudding? Come on. And the villain was so unbelievable.

At least I did not have to skim through the unfunny Bridget-Jonesish stumblings of Eloise, our usual flustered and insecure narrator. For whatever reason, the contemporary frame narrative is completely absent! Odd, but as I had quickly gotten tired of Eloise I did not mind. I liked the original concept that she was a graduate student discovering all these spy adventures in the course of her research, but her story quickly became way too chick-lit.

Overall, a quick and disposable read, painless as long as you don't care about authenticity of language and behavior in your historicals.

Elizabeth (Miss Eliza) says

Review to come, but just as awesome the second time around!

Arabella Dempsey has been thrown back onto the bosom of her family. Her Aunt has made a bit of a to-do, marrying a man closer in age to her niece, who might have been a little too close to her niece's heart.

Arabella's years being raised as her Aunt's companion and nominal heiress have been brushed aside with one wedding vow. She must now return to her family, whom she barely knows, and be a burden on their already strained income. But Arabella is determined to make her way in the world and not go back to be her Aunt's lapdog while the man she loves can never be hers. She is for teaching. Which, according to her old family friend Jane, should really be reconsidered. Has she ever even seen the inside of an all girls school? But she is hired by Miss Climpson, of Miss Climpson's Select Seminary for Young Ladies, and promptly bowled over by one Mr. Reginald Fitzhugh, Turnip to his friends. Turnip has been at the school visiting his sister Sally and her new very "peculiar" particular friends, Lizzy Reid and Agnes Wooliston, who replace the now shunned Catherine Carruthers, she did take Sally's most favorite ribbons after all. Turnip quickly realizes that being in a small room with three very rambunctious teenagers is the last place he wants to be, let alone in a building full of them. Taking the proffered Christmas Pudding, he walks out the door and straight into Miss Dempsey. Despite having met her many a time on the dance floors of the ton, Turnip has no memory of this slightly bruised girl. But then again, Arabella and him never quite occupied the same side of the dance floor, she being more their to wait on her aunt and balance out the numbers. Turnip, always the cheerful gentleman, profusely apologizes and takes his leave of her and his Christmas Pudding. Arabella rushes after Mr. Fitzhugh with his forgotten Pudding only to be attacked by a man outside the school desperate for the pudding. After Mr. Fitzhugh once again picks Miss Demspey out of the gutter, she does have a talent for falling at his feet, they find the deuced oddest thing. A secret message in the pudding! Well, written on the pudding's muslin wrapper to be precise. The message says to meet at Farley Castle, where there is to be a Frost Fair the next day. In a time of spies and the terrors in France, secret messages in puddings are not to be taken lightly, even in all girls schools. Especially if those messages are written in French!

Couldn't the spies have picked anywhere other than the Frost Fair? The place where Arabella is most likely to run into her Aunt and her new Uncle? But she has to admit, showing up with Mr. Fitzhugh, root vegetable though he may be, he's a root vegetable with 30,000. So with Jane in tow they all head to the castle despite bovine interruptions. Once there they discover yet another pudding! Turnip is all for further investigations, but Arabella puts her foot down. Tomorrow she is for the real world of teaching and papers to grade and ink and not very fashionable grey dresses with pockets. This "spy" business might have been fun but it is over. Good luck telling that to the mischievous pudding thief. Beset by students and mysterious mustachioed men in the night, things look to be getting more and more out of hand, as are Arabella's feelings towards Mr. Fitzhugh. But when she finally puts her foot down, when she finally says enough is enough and they must never see each other again, little does she know they are to spend all of the twelve days of Christmas together at a house party in Norfolk. Twelve days of pudding and long glances, and physical assaults. Because the culprits haven't contained themselves to the hallowed halls of a girls school in Bath, they are now lurking the grand passages of Girdings House. But hopefully with an earnest and loving root vegetable all will turn out just as it should, with a kiss under the mistletoe.

Rarely has a book made me smile from ear to ear and laugh aloud as I have reading *The Mischief of the Mistletoe*, twice now I must add. Loosely based on the skeleton of the story *The Watsons*, by Jane Austen, Lauren has taken Austen and amped it up to farce level in the best possible of ways. She has taken Austen, and dare I say, improved it for a modern audience. Austen, while humorous, has a staid and classical voice to her narration, while Willig lets her characters loose, losing hair pins and perhaps their reputations in the process in a hilarious page turner that isn't above adding in a few modern references with *Blackadder* references. The hero of the hour, while, according to Willig, is based on Bertie Wooster, is perhaps the most lovable root vegetable hero in history, even if this means you start confusing Hugh Laurie in *Jeeves and Wooster* with Hugh Laurie as the Prince Regent, I can't but help love Turnip more than Bertie and Hugh Laurie has to beat off my Nicholas Rowe with a stick for the part. He may not be smart, he doesn't over think things, but he has the biggest heart to match his big smile, that you will find yourself sporting as your race towards his happy ending.

While fans of Willig will love that Turnip is finally getting the girl, despite his overly florid taste in waistcoats, I have to say, that I think this novel could easily stand alone. While we do have repeating characters, and overlapping plots, there is enough of a distance and enough new characters, that this is literally the perfect Christmas gift for the literary minded who like a little bit of Regency. One reason being that this book is a very clever idea on Lauren and Dutton's part to do a more giftable book, hence the smaller size, which I kind of opine... and here I'm not talking length, but actual book dimensions, I want my books to have the same height dammit! But also the modern interludes of Colin and Eloise, the scholar and the descendant of the spy, The Purple Gentian, have been excised. I agree with Lauren in many regards to their not being present. She could not have done justice to them in a smaller book. The book wouldn't have been as easily read by those unfamiliar with the previous six installments. But more importantly, it made me have an epiphany, a new realization when I read this book and then proceeded to re-read all her previous books. Colin and Eloise are great, and I love their story, but they have become extraneous. I, who have been the most vocal on their staying, can now see that perhaps, their story has run its course... of course I thought this before reading the next installment, The Orchid Affair, which throws a serious wrench into things, and now I'm desperate for their story line again. In the final analysis, I can't get enough of the world Lauren has created. I want to have young adult novels of the three little sisters. I want to know if Turnip and Arabella ever decided to try some Strawberry jam to replace the standard Raspberry. And I need to know why Sally is scared of chickens. And her ribbons! Are they tying a certain Christmas Pudding? Austen created a memorable world, but each of her six novels are in a rarefied and finite world, whereas, the world is messy. Love has complications and pudding and torn sleeves and missed moments and kisses that could have been. All of this needs mess with the tears and the joy, and Austen might not be messy enough to reflect how life is. Not that we still don't get the fairy tale ending, as Austen was wont to do, but the ride is a little more boisterous.

Nicole says

This book is a total romp. It is my favorite of the series; I never wanted it to end. It was lovely to see things through Turnip's eyes, and to see him find a smart, kind woman who could appreciate him. Willig did a great job of revealing Arabella's background in a way that showed why Turnip is exactly the kind of guy who is perfect for her.

It was also fun to see some of the events in Night Jasmine from a different perspective.

I will admit, I only noticed at the end that there was no Eloise and Colin framing device. I didn't miss it.

While this book doesn't have the complexity of some of the other Pink Carnation novels, it's the literary equivalent of being snuggled up in a warm blanket on the couch with a cup of hot cocoa, which is exactly what a Christmas book should be like.

Leslie says

3.5*

I missed having the sections involving Eloise but otherwise this entry in the Pink Carnation series was most diverting. And it was fun having Jane Austen peripherally involved :)

Julie says

It takes an incredibly gifted author to take unimportant people with serious flaws, keep them true to character, and still make the reader sit up and cheer for them. I loved this book. It is so nice to be able to recommend a book without sex, horror, or anything else to qualify how and why I liked it.

In *Mischief of the Mistletoe*, Reggie "Turnip" Fitzhugh finally gets his romantic turn. He has been a comic foil in most of the other Pink Carnation books. He has been presented as a clueless fop, but entirely good natured. He is still a little clueless, and the author doesn't make him a secret genius or change his character, but you do find out that his apparent lack of understanding is more a matter of what he is and isn't interested in remembering, rather than an ability to remember. He has used his bumbling deliberately a time or two to further the cause of the pink Carnation, but he neither takes pride in that, nor finds it particularly important. He is just a completely guileless character who finally runs into (literally) his true love. I like Arabella, the heroine, too. She is a girl whose hair isn't golden, or flaxen, or russet, it is just hair color, and her eyes are not the color of the sky or the sea or anything else romantic, they are just regular blue. She is used to being overlooked, and has no expectations or anxiety about changing her status. But she recognizes what a priceless thing a man without a fake bone in his body is, and stands up for Turnip when others don't even bother to veil their criticisms.

If you like dry British humor, lots of character building, and a little intrigue and a good deal of romance I recommend this book. There are a couple of hot kisses, but no sex scenes (What a relief) and lots of humor. I laughed out loud too many times to count while reading. It takes a lot to do that. But there is no argument that you have to appreciate this particular type of humor, or you won't find it as funny as I did. The humor is totally wrapped up in what is not said outright, but implied in the character development through dialogue and the character's thoughts.

Rebecca says

I've complained about the awkward device in Willig's novels in which she alternates between dashing spy romances and tepid modern day drama. In this book, delightfully, Eloise-the-irritating-historian makes no appearance whatsoever! Instead, the entire book is focused on the adventures of the English spy set, which is a vast improvement.

Willig continues in well-differentiating between the characters of the different books. Previous heroes and heroines show up now and then, but I very much like the fact that the current hero and heroine do not always like the previous characters. Everyone's a hero in their own story, but they all have flaws and the other characters are quite aware of them. This one thinks that one's priggish, that one thinks the third's a snob, she believes he is untrustworthy, he thinks she's altogether too boring for words.

In this particular story, the male lead has been the buffoon in the previous books. (Willig implies she wrote this one due to popular demand for poor Turnip to get a love story of his own.) He continues to be a complete dolt in this one--he's just kind of dim. But Willig gets well into his head and makes him completely sympathetic while doing doltish things and does a surprisingly good job of not being condescending. He knows he's not very clever and he's doing the best he can. She also does a fantastic job of explaining why a bright enough girl might fall for him--he's genuinely sweet and gallant. He treats her far better than the smarter men do, because he's a genuinely good person who's worthy of being loved. I never would have thought I'd be charmed by someone not very smart--intelligence is absolutely at the top of my personal attraction list. But I genuinely believed in their happy ending--the particular woman values him for the right reasons, and while she'll probably be periodically exasperated with him, I truly believed they would be happy

together in the long run. This is probably the sweetest, silliest, and most fun of all the books in the series.

Amusingly enough, this is the most chaste of this series. Both characters are scarcely the type to sleep with someone they cared about before marriage (although it's implied Turnip has come to some mutually beneficial arrangements with some women outside his class in the past). Since the book ends (oh no, spoilers for a romance!) on a proposal, there's simply no time for more than a couple stolen kisses. Apparently fans were very disappointed that Turnip didn't get any action. So Willig obligingly wrote a short story about their wedding night and handed it over to the crew at Smart Bitches, Trashy Books for distribution. (Have to hand it to the woman, she knows how to keep her fans happy.) It's positively adorable.

Heidi says

4.5 Stars

Oh my. I'm not sure what I was really expecting when I poked my ear buds into their proper place and began listening to *The Mischief of the Mistletoe*, but I certainly wasn't expecting this book to be so much fun. You know those books that cause you to have a big stupid grin on your face throughout the majority of the story? The ones that are particularly awkward to listen to at the gym because people can hear you chuckle choke for lack of air and see the look on your face as you go? *The Mischief of the Mistletoe* is most certainly in that camp.

Arabella Dempsey was quite certain that she would be inheriting her aunt's fortune, and likely marrying a fine young man to boot. That was until that same young man decided to skip Arabella altogether and go strait to the source, marrying her aunt and assuring Arabella's prospects (or lack thereof) as a poor woman with no dowry or inheritance to speak of. Resolving to assert her independence, Arabella takes on a position teaching at Miss Climpson's Select Seminary for Young Ladies. Thinking her worries would be few, Arabella finds quite the opposite when she has to stake her position on preventing elopements and catching international spies.

Reginald Fitzhugh, or Turnip as he is more lovingly known, is quite accustomed to the notion of spies as he is often mistaken for one of them. He hardly expects to find any at his sister Sally's school, however, until he quite literally runs into Arabella Dempsey and a particular Christmas pudding bearing a message in French. Together Turnip and Arabella bumble through a series of puddings and clues attempting to uncover what may be a schoolgirl prank, or may be a French ploy.

Unfamiliar with the character Turnip, not having read the previous *Pink Carnation* books, I can completely understand why so many readers requested demanded he get his own story. A bit of a blundering fool, I quickly fell in love with this man who so rarely says the proper things, but usually the most cunning ones—Mind the mustachios! His surprising protective and gallant nature was quite charming, particularly when directed at the sweet and shy Arabella who seemed not to find him ridiculous whatsoever (or not to mind, at least). I loved how Arabella's very practical side contrasted with Turnip's flamboyant and brash one, though of course she is also imbued with her own wonderful sense of humor. She is understandably reticent to receive any affections from a man known to have had any number of assignations with various women, particularly when her position at the school would be at stake should Turnip's intentions be anything less than honorable.

A romance surrounded by a lighthearted (at least most often lighthearted) mystery, *The Mischief of the Mistletoe* was the perfect holiday romp. The courtship is more real and charming for its lack of frills and poetic nuance. It was hard to take the so-called-villain seriously when there were Christmas puddings and

papier mache scimitars involved, but that's largely what made the whole debacle so entertaining. Kate Reading's narration was wonderful, as her use of the language and inflection helped so much to put our story into the context of it's time. I'm convinced that I'll just have to listen to them all! I can only hope the other books in the Pink Carnation series are as much fun.

So if you're in the mood for some romantic galavanting fun this holiday season, do pick up The Mischief of the Mistletoe by Lauren Willig.

Review originally published at Bunbury in the Stacks.

Shelli says

I don't know if I was just starved for some good, clean romance or what... but this really hit the spot.

When I read Willig's comment that she was writing this book because her readers wanted to know more about Turnip, I honestly thought, "Why? Turnip is a dolt," and I thought, "annoying..." I was too influenced by the other characters who were not always kind in their descriptions of the man.

But it only took about half a page before I was completely in love with him. Turnip is the perfect hero: he's attractive, sweet, he's a complete gentleman and he's really funny.

Mischief follows Arabella Dempsey as she begins teaching at a school in Bath after being booted from her position as companion to her aunt, and disappointed by certain other prospects. Jane Austen makes an appearance - which worried me, but Willig handled it all so perfectly - as Arabella's friend. Her first day at the school is turned upside down when she meets Reggie "Turnip" Fitzhugh and a Christmas pudding. Mystery, hilarity and romance ensues.

I don't know that I would recommend this book to those who are not familiar with the rest of the series, but then again, it might be just enough to whet your appetite for more of Willig's writing. I loved this book as a companion to the rest of the series and was happy to add it to my collection!

Also, for those that are looking for good, clean romances - this is a fabulous one!

Pandora Black says

MIND THE MUSTACHIOS AND FOLLOW THE PUDDING !!!

C'est du grand n'importe quoi mais c'est totalement merveilleux ^^

Pas de gros complots même si il faut résoudre le mystère des messages dans les puddings (je ne pensais pas écrire cette phrase un jour...), étant donné que le tome se passe en parallèle de **The temptation of the night jasmine** ça donne une histoire où pour une fois ce sont les personnages secondaires qui tiennent le premier rôle, Turnip ayant fait des apparitions brèves mais remarquables dans les précédents et Arabella étant la wallflower de base qui passe relativement inaperçue.

Les deux sont absolument parfaits, je fondais beaucoup d'espairs sur Mr Reginald Fitzhugh et avec raison, ce n'est peut-être pas le légume le plus intelligent du potager mais c'est sûrement le plus adorable, et Arabella en face est parfaite pour lui, la tête sur les épaules mais avec des envies de fantaisie qui ne demandaient qu'à pouvoir s'exprimer ^^

C'est totalement adorable et choupi sans être niais, et je pense que ça devient mon tome préféré pour le

moment, avec celui de Miles et Henrietta.

Lisa Kay says

[image error]

Hannah says

Oh, I just *adored* this book. I don't know what I had expected when I picked up *The Mischief of the Mistletoe*, but I certainly didn't expect to discover the historical romance comedy novel of my dreams. Between the delightful little spy mystery, the two sweet characters who form an unlikely hero/heroine pair and their charming romance set in the festive season, this book is a comfort read that really hits the sweet spot.

Set in Bath in the Regency period, this little adventure is actually more about Christmas *pudding* than it is about mistletoe; it is the discovery of a pudding with a mysterious French message that accidentally throws our hero and heroine into the complicated web of international espionage. It does sound rather silly, but that's how it's meant to be - keeping firmly in mind that this is a fun historical romance comedy rather than a spy novel at heart, it works quite well.

Reginald "Turnip" Fitzhugh defines "unlikely hero"; he's kind, earnest, good-humoured and honest to a fault, but he's also frequently bumbling and not the brightest tool in the shed. In short, he's the type of guy who's usually the comic relief, playing sidekick to the alpha hero. It's a credit to Lauren Willig that she can take such a character and highlight all his most lovable traits without attempting to gloss over his flaws - Turnip might not be particularly clever, but he's a genuinely good person who loves and respects Arabella and deserves the same in return. (view spoiler) I had begun the novel hoping that he was hiding some inner genius (intelligence has always been absolutely essential for me in ideal heroes), but I quickly realized that Turnip is endearing just the way he is.

Arabella is a less unlikely heroine than Turnip - as her friend Jane Austen comments, her life would provide ample inspiration for a novel - but she's just as likeable. She begins the novel as a long-time wallflower; eager to please and aware of her poor station in life, she had been content to remain the quiet, shy and overlooked niece and companion to her rich Aunt Osborne. It's her decision to become independent as a junior instructress at a young ladies' school and subsequent meeting with Turnip that forces her to grow and come out of her shell. Just as she immediately recognized how valuable a man with a heart as kind as Turnip is, he also recognized her quick wit and sensible nature. I do so love an heroine who can keep her head (even better than Turnip, really) in a stressful situation and doesn't wait around for help to come; (view spoiler).

It's this type of mutual understanding and friendship established from the outset that makes Turnip and Arabella's romance so delightful; theirs is a romance that develops on solid foundations rather than being insta-love. Gallant Turnip is the type of man who would devote himself with single-minded loyalty to the happiness and safety of his lady love, while intelligent Arabella fully appreciates Turnip for who he is and is the first to defend him from others' condescension. It's utterly sweet and heartwarming; they're a couple that I can see being genuinely happy together with their well-matched personalities and shared sense of humour.

Worth a mention is the inclusion of Jane Austen as a minor character; it's probably not a necessary inclusion and she barely plays a part after the opening third, but I'm not an Austen purist and enjoyed what felt like a

reunion with an old friend, anyway. I also liked the other secondary characters that flitted in and out of the story - Sally Fitzhugh and her friends were surprisingly fun characters with their wild antics and unanimous support of Arabella and I was interested in what little I saw of Turnip's contemporaries.

My only point of criticism is the inconsistencies in period language and behaviour. Every so often, characters would use modern turns of phrase or neglect the rules of propriety - it's definitely enough to draw a raised eyebrow or two, but fortunately it wasn't enough to hinder my enjoyment in any way.

If a lighthearted feel-good Regency romance with plenty of humour is what you're after, then I highly recommend *The Mischief of the Mistletoe*. It doesn't even have to be read with any prior knowledge of the Pink Carnation series - I haven't read the other books and nevertheless thoroughly enjoyed this as a standalone.

Update 15/01/2018: Reread this beloved little gem of a historical romance comedy (or more accurately, tried out the audiobook version read by Kate Reading), and I'm extremely pleased to report that it stood the test of time. Turnip and Arabella are still as endearing as ever and their romance just as delightful. Kate Reading's narration is also excellent; I really enjoyed the variations in tone/voices she used for different characters and she captured the vibrant humor in the story very well.

Christina (Reading Extensively) says

Reginald "Turnip" Fitzhugh finally gets his own adventure when he visits his sister at school and becomes involved in unraveling a mystery surrounding a Christmas pudding with a secret message in the wrapping. Arabella Dempsey has just taken a job as a teacher at the school and together she and Turnip try to foil the plot of a possible French spy while losing their hearts to each other.

Unlike the other titles in the Pink Carnation series, *The Mischief of the Mistletoe* does not feature modern narrator Eloise Kelly but instead is entirely set in the past. It is also devoid of floral spies and rather chaste compared to its predecessors particularly the most recent book, *The Betrayal of the Blood Lily*. Readers who are accustomed to seeing Turnip as a character of ridicule will be surprised to find that he is a man of integrity and depth albeit still clumsy and endearing. Arabella is a likable heroine reminiscent of Charlotte Lansdowne, the mild mannered heroine of *The Temptation of the Night Jasmine*. While events in *The Mischief of the Mistletoe* slightly overlap with the events in *The Temptation of the Night Jasmine*, you don't have to read the other titles in the series to make sense of *The Mischief of the Mistletoe*. The addition of Jane Austen as Arabella's friend and confidante will only increase the novel's appeal to fans of Austen's works.

I found *The Mischief of the Mistletoe* to be a delightful and lighthearted holiday romance. At first I wasn't sure that I would like a book featuring Turnip as a main character but since the author wisely did not try to turn him into a macho hero, it really worked as a sweet romance. The mystery element is not as strong as it is in the rest of the series but it makes for a nice change. If you are in the mood for some holiday reading, give *The Mischief of the Mistletoe* a try.

Readalikes: *What Happens in London* by Julia Quinn, *Ten Things I Love About You* by Julia Quinn

Amanda says

This was as enjoyable upon rereading as it was to read it the first time. Turnip is a really lovable hero for a

romance novel. Built like an alpha who acts far more like a beta male, Turnip is funny and humble a really freaking adorable. Arabella is a lovely heroine stuck in an all-too real hard place. Whilst having circumnavigated the upper echelons of society, she is too poor to truly fit in and has to resort to working for a living. I very much appreciated Arabella's tall height and big feet, as oftentimes romance heroines are petite and perfect all around. Apart from her physical differences, Arabella is also a bit of an odd duck, which makes her as lovable as Turnip. This is just Christmasey enough to get me in the giggly holiday spirit and never before have I encountered a more steamy first kiss.

QNPoohBear says

Miss Arabella Dempsey has been living with her Aunt Osborne since the death of her mother some years ago. Her wealthy aunt gave her the best of everything, including a London season, but Arabella remained a wallflower until she met the charming Captain Musgrave. Now Captain Musgrave is her new uncle and Arabella is left out in the cold (almost literally) since her aunt's imprudent marriage to a younger man. Arabella has a sickly clergyman father and three younger sisters to care for. She's determined to see her sisters' future secured by taking a place as a teacher at a young ladies' seminary. Her friend, Miss Jane Austen, warns against it, but Arabella thinks it will be fine. She didn't bargain for literally running into a gentleman nicknamed Turnip; finding mysterious messages inside Christmas puddings; lively teenage girls; midnight intruders and perhaps spies! If Arabella had known all that, would she have accepted the position? If she hadn't, she never would have met Reginald "Turnip" Fitzhugh, not the brightest star of the beau monde but an all-around nice gentleman. Though they have met before, Turnip does not remember Arabella, but after their first unusual reunion, he's determined never to forget her name. When a mysterious message shows up in the Christmas pudding his little sister Sally pushed at him, he and Arabella find themselves faced with the possibility of tracking down spies and traitors. Arabella is convinced this is all a prank or much ado about nothing but Turnip, having some experience in the matter, believes Arabella to be in danger. As the Christmas season goes on, Turnip and Arabella get to know each other better than they ever did in a London ballroom and Turnip is determined to keep Arabella safely by his side for as long as possible - maybe even forever.

This volume of the Pink Carnation series appears to be more of a spin-off. I haven't read the others but a handy list of characters in the back cleared up any questions I had after finishing the novel. The plot was inspired by Jane Austen's unfinished novel *The Watsons*. In this book, Arabella is the eldest and the plot veers wildly from what Jane Austen intended. Jane herself appears as a character in the novel, which I did not like. Her presence seemed superfluous and her dialogue was copied from letters and other writings which is immediately recognizable to any dedicated Janeite. The story didn't have to be *The Watsons*. It stands on it's own just fine.

The characters really make this novel superior to most Regencies and even cozy mysteries. Even the supporting characters are great. I fully expected to hate Sally and her "most particular" friends and dismiss them as annoying teenage girls, but I truly grew to love them in the midnight intruder scene. I especially liked Lizzie. They made me laugh. Miss Climpson is only in one scene and she steals it with her absurd dialogue.

The main characters are stellar too. Turnip is a beta hero. He's bumbling, forgetful and fond of shockingly garish clothing but he's a loyal friend and a true gentleman. I wouldn't want to marry him but I enjoyed him immensely. He's so funny and charming the way he is. I like his sense of humor and how Arabella shares the same sense of the absurd. I love his Shakespeare references (or thingamummy, what's her name? Macwhatsit?). Arabella is a great heroine and I really liked her character development. She starts off as a wallflower whom no one remembers and ends up a heroine. I liked her journey very much and wanted her to

succeed and be happy. I also like that she's intelligent and capable of handling any situation without vapors.

The plot resembles a cozy mystery though there's no murder. I could NOT put this book down. The rollicking mystery plot had me guessing at every turn. I was rather surprised at the villain. I guessed that person had something to do with it but never did it cross my mind how much or who the villain would turn out to be. There are any number of red herrings to complicate matters. The romance is awesome! It's sweet with a little bit of checking out each other's figures. There are a few kissing scenes that are perfectly clean. The romance develops nicely over a short period of time and concludes with a comical scene that will please the reader. The story plays out like a comedy of manners nearly in the style of Georgette Heyer. I nitpicked the inaccurate language (not period/American) and inaccuracies. If you like the idea of Georgette Heyer but struggle with the language, try this novel instead. If you love Heyer's beta heroes, you must read this book.
