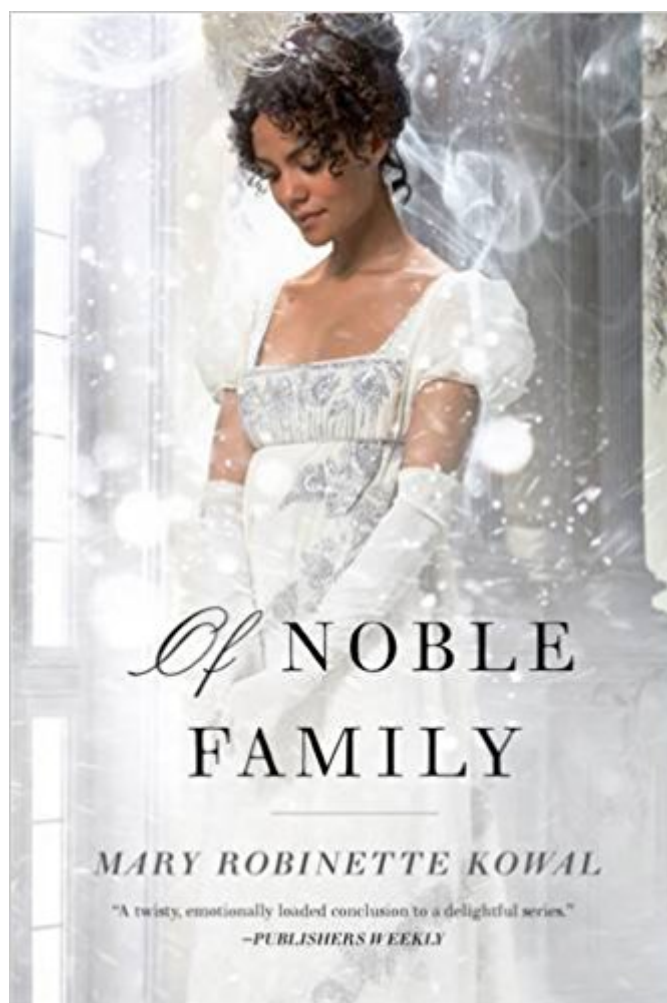


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Of Noble Family (Glamourist Histories)



Synopsis

Jane and Vincent have finally gotten some much-needed rest after their adventures in Italy when Vincent receives word that his estranged father has passed away on one of his properties in the West Indies. His brother, who manages the estate, is overwhelmed, and no one else in his family can go. Grudgingly, out of filial duty the couple decide to go. The sea voyage is long and Jane spends enough time unable to perform glamour that towards the end of the trip she discovers that she is with child. They are overjoyed, but when they finally arrive at the estate to complete what they expect to be routine legal tasks, they realize that nearly everything they came expecting to find had been a lie. Also, the entire estate is in disarray, with horrifying conditions and tensions with the local slave population so high that they are close to revolt. Jane and Vincent's sense of peril is screaming out for them to flee, but Vincent cannot stand to leave an estate connected with his family in such a condition. They have survived many grand and terrifying adventures in their time, but this one will test their skills and wits more than any they have ever encountered before, this time with a new life hanging in the balance. Mary Robinette Kowal's *Of Noble Family* is the final book of the acclaimed *Glamourist Histories*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A twisty, emotionally loaded conclusion to a delightful series." • *Publishers Weekly* "Kowal paints a lovely picture of a couple who truly complement and support each other, capping off a terrific series." • *Library Journal*

MARY ROBINETTE KOWAL was the 2008 recipient of the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer and a Hugo winner for her story "For Want of a Nail." Her short fiction has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Asimov's*, and several Year's Best anthologies. She also writes the Glamourist History series, which began with *Shades of Milk and Honey*. A professional puppeteer and voice actor, she spent five years touring nationally with puppet theaters. She lives in Chicago with her husband Rob and many manual typewriters.

I am going to miss Jane and Vincent. *Of Noble Family* is the married couple's fifth and final adventure in Mary Robinette Kowal's Glamourist History series set in an alternate Regency Britain enhanced by glamour, the loveliest system of magic I've encountered. But while their glamourised displays are often breathtaking, Jane and Vincent have taken ether-based illusions far beyond the ubiquitous drawing room decorations created by accomplished young women. In previous books they've found practical, if hair-raising, applications for glamour in the war against Napoleon, the Luddite riots, and an escapade involving pirates on the Mediterranean. For this last story the couple will be off to the Caribbean. When the book opens, Jane and Vincent have been resting after their harrowing exploits on the Italian Island of Murano and enjoying the company of Jane's family, especially her sister Melody's new baby boy, who is already showing a precocious ability to see inside glamourised images. But things don't stay relaxing for long. Vincent receives a letter from his brother Richard that turns their world upside down. The first shocking piece of news is that Vincent's father has died of a stroke at the family estate on the Caribbean island of Antigua. Lord Verbury fled to the island in an earlier book to avoid being imprisoned for treason. Since Vincent was badly abused by his father while growing up, the death wasn't as upsetting to him as it might be, but the bad news didn't end there. Upon their father's death, Vincent's oldest brother Garland inherited the title Lord Verbury, bought himself a new barouche-landau, and then died when the vehicle overturned on the badly maintained road leading to Lyme Regis. Vincent's middle brother, Richard, was severely injured in the accident, losing one of his feet. In his letter Richard asks Vincent for a very large favor. Apparently their father's most recent will is in Antigua, and it will only be released to one of the sons. Richard's injuries make it impossible for him to travel right now, so he's asking Vincent to make the journey and straighten out any problems on the estate that need attention. Jane is completely against it. Why should Vincent go? She's seen how poisonous anything to do with his father is for Vincent, and Vincent has already disassociated

himself from his family by changing his last name. But Richard has always been kind to Vincent and was just as badly treated by their father himself. Plus, being professional glamourists Jane and Vincent have no possibility of work in Britain for the time being anyway. Beloved Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV, recently died in childbirth so the country is in mourning for a year and all glamour has been stripped from homes and public places. For these reasons, Vincent decides to help Richard by traveling to Antigua, and Jane of course goes with him, but nothing turns out as they expected. The boat journey across the Atlantic is much more difficult than any water trip they've made before, and once they reach the island they discover they've been lied to as shocking family secrets begin to come to light. *Of Noble Family* is a heart-racingly superb conclusion to the series and includes all the charms I've come to expect from Kowal. I love that the books don't shy away from charged historical issues--here Jane and Vincent are confronting slavery, and grappling with their own prejudices and well-meaning but sometimes short sighted feelings about it--and I love that the stories aren't set only generally during the Regency period--all the stories take place at specific times, this one during the mourning period for Princess Charlotte. It continues to be a pleasure to see what happens after an Austen-like happy ending marriage. Jane and Vincent have a strong relationship but it's not effortlessly wonderful and they have to work at it. Also, *Of Noble Family* is a richer story than it might have been in other hands because Jane and Vincent aren't its only heroes. The enslaved characters practice their own forms of glamour, and act with agency, resource, and intelligence. My only complaint is the one you'd expect--I wish there was going to be another book. But Kowal wraps everything up in a moving and satisfying way, and there is at least one more thing to look forward to. Kowal always narrates the audio versions of her books, but since *Of Noble Family* has characters with Caribbean accents this time she has the help of two other readers. I've listened to a sample and it's wonderful, especially Prentice Onayemi's deep, Mr. Darcy-like interpretation of Vincent's voice. I'm going to enjoy revisiting the story in audio form. I read an advanced review copy of this book provided to me at no cost by the publisher. Review opinions are mine. Originally posted on the *Austenprose* website.

This final volume in the *Glamourist Histories* sees Jane and Vincent travel to Antigua to settle his father's estate. Upon arrival they learn that Lord Verbery is not dead though he did suffer a stroke. He is in hiding to avoid being arrested. He has support from a number of people who are keeping him hidden. He is also not above the use of blackmail and other threats. Jane and Vincent first want to leave immediately but Jane is pregnant and not doing well. It doesn't help that Verbery's doctor

almost bleeds her to death as a way of keeping her on the island. Meanwhile, they are also dealing with an overseer who is unnecessarily brutal to the slaves and who has Lord Verbery's blessing for his actions. They are also surprised that the man in charge of the household is Lord Verbery's natural son who is being forced to do what the Earl demands because of threats to sell the rest of his family away. While Jane is not able to do glamour while being pregnant, she spends a lot of time of the slaves who have their own forms of glamour. Jane is determined to write a book about the different traditions of glamour. She gets to learn a lot about the lives of slaves on the plantation as she meets with a number who can do glamour. She also calls on their help when she and Vincent are commissioned to create the glamour to decorate the ballroom for an annual charity ball. I loved the relationship between Jane and Vincent. He has such a hard time because knowing that his father is alive and being forced to spend time with him brings back so many of the memories of the abuse he suffered at his father's hands as a boy. It also raises his fear that he is too like his father to be a good father to his child. This story had a huge amount of intensity both because of the setting and because of the threats to Jane's life and health. I couldn't put it down.

Of Noble Family was a great novel, but it couldn't help but suffer by comparison to its predecessor, Valour and Vanity. That book had all the complex plot, character, and relationship development, not to mention exciting action, that proved Mary Robinette Kowal has grown into a formidable force in modern fantasy. This novel, on the other hand, seemed more intensely personal and therefore quieter, with more simmering anxiety than explosive conflict. [Minor Spoilers] We see Jane and Vincent in this story as more matured versions of themselves, yet at the same time, the weakest versions of themselves. Vincent is completely coming apart under the influence of his father, while Jane is insecure in Antigua's unfamiliar culture and in her increasingly pregnant condition. While Jane's resolution is fairly satisfying, Vincent's is somewhat lacking. It's obvious from the moment his father appears that only his death will give Vincent the relief he needs, and that's a shame because as a reader, I really wanted to see our hero overcome that terrible influence. The new characters were a real pleasure, as I enjoyed getting to know Frank and his family, as well as Nkiruka, who was frankly my favorite character in this novel. But if I have one final complaint..... the addition of birth control (a condom) at the end of the story REALLY ruined it for me. I won't go into all the reasons, but it just felt too modern and really sucked the vulnerability and romance out of the couple's relationship. I think Kowal could have had just as successful of an ending without that, but I understand that she wanted to reassure her readers that Jane and Vincent would have a long life together. For me, though, it really jolted me out of the fantasy. Overall, a well-written story and a

solid ending to a fun series. I look forward to seeing what Kowal does next.

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