

Number 1 Bestselling Author

Arietta  
Richmond



*Madame's  
Christmas  
Marquis*

*His Majesty's Hounds  
(An Additional Short Story)  
Sweet and Clean Regency Romance*



*His Majesty's Hounds*  
(and additional short story)  
Sweet and Clean Regency Romance

*Madame's*  
*Christmas Marquis*

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ARIETTA RICHMOND



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- Intriguing the Viscount
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Lady Theodora's Christmas Wish

The Duke's Improper Love (coming soon)

## *Dedication*

This book is a Christmas Gift to my readers who inspire me to continue writing, by buying my books!

Especially for those of you who have taken the time to email me, or to leave reviews, and tell me what you love about these books, and what you'd like to see more of – thank you – I'm listening, I promise to write more about your favourite characters.

For my growing team of beta readers and advance reviewers – it's thanks to you that others can enjoy these books in the best presentation possible!

And for all the writers of Regency Historical Romance, whose books I read, who inspired me to write in this fascinating period.



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ARIETTA RICHMOND

## *Chapter One*

Madame Beaumarais locked the street door, then went through the workroom to lock the door to the lane. Outside, the world was crisp and white, the snow falling steadily. It made her sad. Christmas always did, now.

She went up past the waiting salon and the fitting rooms, pushed the heavy red drape aside, unlocked the door, and went up again, into her private rooms. This was the only place where she could truly be herself – a place which had not been entered by anyone but her, since the day that she had bought the building, four long years earlier.

Here, in these rooms, were the only remaining traces of her life before - a life that war had forced her to put aside, a life in which she had been happy, and blessed in so many ways.

She was, she supposed, still truly blessed, for she was still alive, as so many she had known were not. She had, now, a good business, with clients of the highest calibre, and did not, really, lack for anything.

Except the one thing which she most desired.

She could not believe that Jacques was dead, yet, surely, he must be, if he had not found her by now.

With but two days until Christmas day, she had finished her work for the nonce. She would not open the shop doors again for a week or more – the Christmas Balls were done, or about to be, and all of the commissioned gowns had been delivered. She had sent the seamstresses home for the holiday, and paid them a bonus for their year's hard work.

Now, alone, she could allow herself to think of the past, and to grieve for everything that she would never have again. It was a luxury which she only allowed herself at this time of year. She stirred up the banked coals, and added wood to the fire, then settled into her favourite chair. As she watched, through the window before her, the snow falling across the rooftops of London, what she saw in her mind was very different.

She would always remember the look on Jacques' face as he kissed her, and bid her leave, the snow swirling around them.

“My darling Colette, you must go. The gate to Monsieur Villeneuve’s courtyard is at the end of this lane. He will help you. Go to England. I will find you there, when I can. I would come with you, but that would be a greater risk. And... I must try to save Phillipe – I cannot simply let my brother die.”

She had stretched up to kiss him again, the tears on her face mingling with the kiss of the snowflakes, and then turned and fled down the lane, as he had faded back into the falling snow, and hiding. The bundle she carried held everything she had left in the world – most of it jewels and money, for she would need that to survive. It seemed overwhelmingly heavy as she ran, the weight of her life in so small a package.

Monsieur Villeneuve had opened the gate, and quickly taken her down into his cellars, and through a hidden door.

“Madame Marquise, you will be safe here, and warm, until the morning. Then, we will transform you into someone else, and Jean-Pierre will take you to the coast, like any other passenger, in the morning coach. We will need to change any money that you have, save just a little, into gems – for they will be far easier to sell once you get to England, where French coin would not be well received.”

“Thank you, M’sieur. I must trust to your knowledge and discretion.”

Heart aching, she had sunk into the chair by the fire, there in Monsieur Villeneuve's deep cellar, had eaten the food that he brought, and thought of the morning with terror, her heart aching for the fact that Jacques was not by her side. The loss of their estates, the loss of all her fine gowns and the other trappings of an entitled life were nothing compared to his absence.

When Villeneuve returned, late in the evening, with blankets and cushions to turn the long couch in the cellar into a comfortable bed, he had asked her a fateful question.

"Madame Marquise, when we give you a new identity, it would be best if it is something that you will most easily be able to prove to others. Pray, tell me what skills you may have, which we might turn to your advantage now?"

Colette had stilled where she sat, staring at him in consternation.

"M'sieur, I am, like most women of noble birth, lamentably lacking in the practical skills that those of other classes take for granted."

He had laughed, kindly, in appreciation of her blunt acknowledgement of the situation.

"Surely, there must be something that you do well?"

“Of all the ‘ladylike’ accomplishments, the only one that I do at all well is sew – not simply embroidery, but things far more complex – as a child, I became obsessed with making clothes for my dolls. I freely admit to having no ear for music, and my skills as a painter are somewhat lamentable. I ride well, but that would be of little use elsewhere. And, whilst my conversation is reportedly entertaining, I do not see that as easily turned to advantage either.”

Villeneuve had looked at her, serious, and considering. Eventually he spoke.

“Skill with the needle could, indeed, be turned to advantage, not just as you travel, but when you reach England. French modistes are sought after by the Aristocracy of England, I believe, for they are aware that we have a far better sense of style than they.”

Colette had laughed, quite in agreeance with him, for what she had seen of the English bore out his statement.

“Then I am to become a seamstress, and sew for my living?”

“It will serve to keep you alive. Let us hope that you do not need to live that lie for too long, and that the Marquis can save his brother, and join you in England soon.”

“That is my most fervent wish.”

“Then, from the morning, you will be known simply as Madame Beaumarais, a skilled seamstress, on her way to visit a friend. I will send a rider ahead, and when you reach the coast, go straight to the port. Board the ‘Roi de Calais’ – her Master will be expecting Madame Beaumarais. He will put you ashore in England, as close to London as he dares make land. You will have the company of an injured Englishman, so you will not be alone once you land. I will leave you to sleep, and prepare yourself for the morning.”

And so it had gone. Colette had sat in the coach, dressed in a high quality, but plain dress, a portmanteau containing her only possessions at her feet, and a fortune in gems sewn into hidden pockets in her stays and her dress. The snow had fallen, hiding the land, as if her previous life had already been wiped away.

On the ship, the Englishman had been polite and distant, introduced as Mr John Black – a name she suspected was not his true name. But he had been everything one might hope for in a gentleman. He had stayed with her until London, and even helped her find a jeweller to sell some gems to, not raising an eyebrow at what he saw of what she carried.

She wondered, briefly, what he had been doing in France, and decided that it was best she not know.



Mr Black, seemingly remarkably well connected for a man just returned from France, had also introduced her to a very proper man of business - a man of discretion, whom she immediately trusted. Within the day, she was established in a high quality hotel, and within the week she had purchased a suitable narrow building of four floors, well placed in the fashionable part of the city, where the aristocracy shopped.

Having a place that was hers alone eased her mind greatly. If she was to be a modiste, then she would be a very high class modiste indeed – she would be respected, and sought after, and paid well. Quite how she was to achieve that, she was not certain, but she was determined to do so.

On the day that the building had become hers, she had entered, locked the doors, and gone up the stairs, to collapse into the very chair in which she now sat, and burst into tears of grief. It had been two days short of Christmas.



## *Chapter Two*

Jacques Pelletier, Marquis de Beaumarais, stepped onto the dock in London, and looked around him. The huge city spread out from the docks, a sprawling mess, with dark coal fire smoke filling the air, as the residents tried to stay warm in the face of heavy snowfall. How would he ever find her?

He did not know, but he would do so, somehow. Again, the guilt ate at him – he had been apart from Colette for these four long years, all because of Phillippe – Phillippe, who he had, in the end, failed to save. The grief was still fresh. He had been too late to Phillippe, and his injuries were great. Still, with Jacques care, he had continued to live – but he had never recovered – in mind or body. He had been weak, frail, and as the winter had set in this year, he had finally succumbed to consumption, and died.

What made Jacques feel most guilty, was that all he had felt by then was relief – it had freed him to seek Colette, praying that she was well. He had buried Phillipe, with a quiet service from the old village priest, who had no idea of Jacques' station in life, and gone from the cottage they had lived in, back to Chateau Beaumarais.

As he drove his chaise along the rutted gravel of the drive, his breath caught at the beauty and the sadness of it. It was a ruin, as were so many of the noble houses after the depredations of the war, yet he hoped that his preparations had been enough.

No one had attempted to live within its walls, and the eerie echo of his footsteps on the filthy marble of the entryway floor seemed to call forth the ghosts of his childhood.

Phillipe should have been by his side.

But the time for grief was not then – he was there for a purpose. He made his way down to the cellars, seeing, all the way, the evidence of the destruction that had been wrought on his home. In the cellars, as he had hoped, the heavy wine barrels had been drained of their contents, but not moved – for the huge pile of them, hard up against the wall, seemed to have no use beyond containing wine.

He set to work, dragging them away, dismantling the stack one at a time, until finally, the wall behind them was exposed – and the door within it. He pulled the cord from around his neck, and unlocked the door with the key which had hung there so long, in anticipation of this day.

Inside, as he had hoped, all was well, row after row of oilcloth wrapped paintings were waiting for him, with an added layer of dust the only change from the day that he had locked the door and left. Amongst the paintings, a number of small chests were concealed. It was those he went to first. Filling his pockets with the gems and jewellery, he considered the room. He could not fit everything in the chaise – it would take many trips, but he could fit enough to serve his purpose for now.

Two hours later, with twenty paintings carefully stacked in the chaise, the door in the cellar locked again, and just enough barrels moved back to cover it, he drove away.

Monsieur Villeneuve was not surprised to hear a quiet knock on his back gate – but he was surprised to see who stood waiting when he opened it.

“My Lord.”

Villeneuve bowed, his eyes aight.

“No longer that, Villeneuve, for now, I am simply Jacques.”

“As you wish.”

“Will the chaise fit into your yard?”

“Of course!”

Villeneuve stepped to one side, unclipping something, and what appeared to be a solid section of wall shifted, revealing a cleverly concealed wide gate. Jacques quickly drove the chaise inside, and Villeneuve restored his ‘wall’ to its place.

“I must know – did Colette escape as we planned?”

“She did indeed, and the Master of the ‘Roi de Calais’ reported that he put her ashore near London.”

Jacques released a breath he had not known he held – he had trusted Villeneuve, yet he had worried – the only thing that had kept him sane these last long four years, had been the thought that, one day, he would see Colette again.

“Then that is where I must go, as soon as I can. In the chaise, you will find many paintings, those that once graced the walls of Chateau Beaumarais. There are more where they came from. Am I right in believing that you will be able to sell them? That you might be willing to provide me with a rather large sum, in exchange for not just these, but for all of those still hidden?”

“Let me see them, before I answer you.”

Jacques had turned to the chaise, and pulled out the first few, unwrapping the oilcloth carefully. Villeneuve had sucked in his breath, sharply.

“Yes. Let us get these into my cellars, then we can put your horse in the stable, and get out of the cold. You can tell me about the rest of them over a cognac by the fire.”

Jacques nodded, and they had set to work.

An hour later, sipping a decent cognac for the first time in four years, Jacques had explained, had described, in detail, every painting that was in that cellar at Chateau Beaumarais – they were burned into his memory, each with an association with his childhood, or his life with Colette. Villeneuve had smiled, delighted.

“I know that I have a buyer for all of these. They will end up in England. Do not ask me more. But I will pay you, as you asked, a rather extravagant amount for them – an amount that will still allow me a substantial profit.”

“Good – you deserve whatever profit you wish, for you have my eternal gratitude for getting Colette away safely. Are you also able to pay me in gems and other easily sold items? I expect that will still be easier in England than French coin.”

“Indeed, it will – thought the war is two years ended, some things are still chancy. I can pay you as you wish.”

That night, Jacques slept in comfort in Villeneuve’s guest chamber, lighter of heart than he had been since he had watched the falling snow swallow up Colette’s retreating figure.

The following morning, almost four years to the day after his wife’s departure from this same house, he followed the same road to the coast. He drove himself – he would sell the horse and chaise once he reached the port. Even the snow falling around him could not dim his happiness, for he was, finally, going towards Colette.



Jacques shook aside the memories, picked up his bags and walked away from the docks. The Captain had suggested a particular Inn of high quality, which he declared to be located in the ‘best part of London’. Jacques had no choice but to trust him, and gave its direction to the driver of the cleanest looking cab he could find. As they traversed the London streets, full of dirtied snow and hurrying people, he considered where to start his search for Colette.

It was but two days to Christmas.



## *Chapter Three*

Eventually, Madame shook herself out of her memories, and went to prepare herself some food. Tonight, she could not face going out, although a hot meal from the Chesterfield Inn would have been pleasant in the chill weather. Perhaps she would indulge herself tomorrow, for luncheon, while she had the luxury of a day away from the shop. For now, some slices of cold meat with bread and cheese would do, with a hot posset warmed over her parlour fire.

She set it warming, and went to build up the fire in her bedchamber, glad of the strong shutters and heavy drapes that kept the warmth in the room. It was a large room, with only a dressing room beside it for the whole of the top floor. In summer, it was beautiful, with a magnificent view across to the parks.

In winter, she rarely looked from the window, for the snow was too much of a reminder of all that she had left behind. On the wall opposite her bed, a very small picture hung. A landscape, of Chateau Beaumarais, the lake glinting in front of it, the afternoon light golden on its stone. That, and the necklace that hung, always, around her neck, was all that she had left of who she had once been. Her fingers went to the emerald where it hung in its golden setting, and her heart ached.

She shook herself out of the maudlin feelings, and went back down to her dinner. It had been a good year. The next would be better. She had new clients – women she had come to love for themselves, as much as for what they paid her, and she was blessed in having met them. If only Jacques had come, her life would be complete – she did not need great wealth or position, but love... that, she missed.

She ate, and drank the warm posset, then, closing the drapes in the parlour and banking the fire, she took herself to bed, with the luxurious knowledge that she need not rise early on the morrow.



The Captain had not misled him.

The Chesterfield Inn was, indeed, a high-quality establishment, on the edge of the highest-class shopping district. The small amount of coin which the Captain had provided, in exchange for a gem worth far more, was enough to see him settled into a decent set of rooms – a bedchamber, a dressing room, and a small private parlour.

Tomorrow, he would seek out a jeweller, of the better kind, and convert some more of his wealth into coin, then find himself a bank, and a man of business – there would be much to do, to establish himself here, as himself – the Marquis de Beaumarais. There was, as well, the matter of suitable attire – for his current dress, whilst suitable for a well-off French country gentleman, was not appropriate for one of the nobility.

Well pleased with the day, and sure that, once tomorrow's tasks were complete, he would, somehow, soon discover Colette, he settled to sleep, drifting into dreams of her lips on his, the snowflakes melting in the tears on her cheeks.

In the morning, after the best sleep he'd had since Monsieur Villeneuve's, he called for a breakfast to be brought up to his parlour, and planned out his day. The maid who brought the food was, as he had hoped, an excellent source of information, if a little on the gossipy side. She was happy to answer all of his questions.

He noted down the direction of jewellers, tailors, bankers and men of business, amused by her perceptive and rather brutally honest commentary on who was more honest and reliable, and why – for she had seen the young men of the *ton* who struggled with debt, and watched who kept them afloat and who simply bled them dry. He must remember to be most careful in her presence, lest he end up as blithely discussed and disregarded.

Well satisfied, he ate his excellent breakfast, dressed in the best he had available and, with his portable wealth discreetly disposed about his person, set off, with the intent of beginning with the jewellers, and then the tailors, for he wished to look the part before dealing with bankers.

As he descended the stairs, a movement caught his attention. Below him, a woman was passing through the door into the dining room. He only saw her for a moment, just the elegant flick of her skirt as she moved, and the brightness of the feather in her bonnet. But there was something, something about the way that she moved. He shook his head – he wanted so much to find Colette that he was seeing echoes of her in everything. He went on, leaving the unknown woman to her meal in peace, and went to find a jeweller of good repute.

## *Chapter Four*

Jacques watched the people of London going about their lives around him, fascinated, despite himself. So similar, and yet so different. Almost as he remembered Paris, yet alien in a way. He found the suggested Jeweller without difficulty and, after watching the type of person who went in and out of the shop for a while, he decided to go in.

“May I help you sir?”

“I hope that you will do so. I have a collection of gems, which I wish to sell. These are of the highest quality, from my family collection, but I find myself in need of the money more than the gems.”

The jeweller's eyes lit with an acquisitive glint, and he gestured for Jacques to show him the jewels.

As he tipped a small quantity onto the piece of softened suede that the jeweller had placed on the counter, he saw the man's eyes widen.

"They are, as you can see, genuine, and of perfect quality."

The jeweller nodded, and turned the gems in his fingers, examining each minutely. He named a price. Jacques affected a shocked expression, and shook his head. The jeweller sighed, and considered. It was obvious that he wanted the gems. Jacques simply waited. Finally, the man looked at him again, and named a much higher figure.

"Monsieur, you are still not offering me their true value. You can do better. Or should I visit your competitor, across the street?"

The man paled, and drew himself up.

"You drive a hard bargain, sir, I see that you know the value of what you have."

Jacques simply nodded, and waited again. Finally, the jeweller named a figure which was more than double the first price he had offered. Jacques knew that the stones were worth more. But let the man have his profit – it was an acceptable price.

"Done. I am sure that you can provide immediate payment?"

The jeweller nodded.

“Please wait.”

He disappeared through a curtain at the rear of the shop, and the faint sounds that reached Jacques suggested the opening of a safe. Soon, he returned carrying a substantial purse. Jacques counted it out as the man watched, then bowed.

“My thanks. Perhaps we will do business again.”

The jeweller was so busy scooping up the gems that he barely noticed Jacques leave.



Colette settled into the corner nook in the dining room of the Chesterfield Inn, and the staff, who knew her well, came happily to serve her. A warm meal was just what was needed, to allow her to forget, for a little, the snow outside, and the emptiness of another Christmas without Jacques. She watched the people around her – such a mix of people, from different stations in life.

Four years ago, she could never have imagined having friends who were merchants, friends who were maids and innkeepers, and more. Yet now she did, and valued their friendship, as much as that of the ladies of the aristocracy.

She lived in a strange twilight world between the upper classes and the lower, being a special kind of highly valued and highly paid servant – almost an advisor to her clients. It was, she had discovered, quite a pleasant way to live. She pushed aside thoughts of Jacques, and concentrated on being grateful for the life she had.

Still – she could not stop herself from wondering where he was, at that moment – was he warm and safe somewhere? Or was he cold and long dead, beneath the snow-covered ground? Perhaps she would never know.



The tailor's establishment was obviously one patronised by the highest of the nobility, and the man's expression when he surveyed Jacques from head to toe indicated that he believed Jacques to be in a place well above his station. Jacques was amused, and drew himself up, putting on his most supercilious and superior expression.

“Good day to you, Monsieur. I am the Marquis de Beaumarais. Your establishment was recommended to me as one able to meet my need for attire of the best cut, style and quality, rapidly.”



The man blinked, rather taken aback, and Jacques was hard pressed not to laugh. Taking advantage of the man's confusion, he continued.

"I will, of course, pay handsomely for your services, especially with respect to my immediate need for better attire," he waved an elegant hand, indicating his current clothing, and grimaced expressively, "I am afraid that the loss of my trunk in my travel to London from Paris has left me rather sadly out of mode."

The tailor's face cleared, and he hurried forward.

"Of course, my Lord, come this way, I believe I do have some items which might be adjusted today, to suit you," he paused, looking somewhat distressed, before he went on, "I would not normally ever suggest providing something pre-made, but," he waved in Jacques' direction, "this is an emergency case."

An hour later, Jacques exited the tailor's dressed in elegant yet fashionable attire, complete with a winter coat and scarf of luxurious softness. The tailor assured him that the other three sets of clothing he had ordered – and paid for on the spot, would be delivered to the Chesterfield Inn by the following morning – Christmas Eve.

As he turned to leave, the tailor, looking a little unsure, cleared his throat, then spoke.

“I had meant to ask – Beaumarais – it is not a common name to hear in London, yet I know of one other who bears that name. There is a modiste – a woman who has become the most sought after in London, these few years past, also French, a Madame Beaumarais. My gentlemen often bemoan how much their wives have spent on her services. I hesitate to suggest such a connection, between one in trade and the nobility, but... could she be related to your family, somehow?”

Jacques heart skipped a beat, and he slowly turned back to face the tailor. Was it possible? Could this be what Colette had achieved? Monsieur Villeneuve had said that she intended to pose as a seamstress...

“I do not know, Monsieur. The wars have torn so many families apart. But thank you for that information. Perhaps I will seek her out, and discover if there is a connection, however distant.”

The tailor nodded, pleased that Jacques was not insulted, and gave him a vague description of the location of her business. Jacques had no idea where the place he described was – but he would find it. Any potential lead to wards Colette was worth following.

He left the tailors feeling positive, and set off towards the bankers.

## *Chapter Five*

When he reached the banker's establishment, he was glad that he had gone to the tailors first. The building was imposing, without being ostentatious. A footman opened the door as he approached, not so surreptitiously looking him over – which Jacques took to indicate that, all customers of this bank were known on sight, and that new faces were unusual. Inside, he was greeted politely, but with evident curiosity.

“Good day, my Lord, how may Bartholomew Bankers assist you today?”

“I am the Marquis de Beaumarais, newly arrived from France. You have been recommended to me as a reliable and discreet establishment. I would like to discuss opening accounts with you, as I intend to stay in England indefinitely.”

The clerk's expression had become obsequious, but his eyes were calculating.

"Certainly, my Lord, do come this way. May I offer you some refreshment whilst I inform Mr Bartholomew of your presence?"

"Coffee, perhaps, if you have it?"

"Certainly, I will arrange it immediately."

He showed Jacques into an expensively furnished parlour, and disappeared, hurrying down a corridor into the back of the building.

Minutes later, a maid delivered the coffee, curtsayed and left. Jacques savoured it, relaxed and happy to wait. His mind was still reeling from the possibilities inherent in the tailor's casual question. What if it was Colette? Could it be so easy? And... how would she react when she saw him? For the first time, he considered how it must have been from her perspective. It had been four long years, and she had no way to know if he was even still alive, for he had not had any way to contact her. What if... what if she had thought him dead, when so many years passed without him coming to find her? What if she had found comfort in the arms of another man?

The idea terrified him. Colette was what he had lived for, through the years of hiding, and nursing Phillippe.

He would simply have to find the building that the tailor had described, as soon as possible – he had to know.

His musings were disturbed when an older man bustled into the room. He was somewhat corpulent, and florid of face, his expression astute yet friendly. Jacques felt an immediate liking for the man.

“Benjamin Bartholomew Esq. at your service, my Lord.”

The man bowed, and Jacques waved him to the seat closest to him.

“Thank you, Mr Bartholomew. I wish to establish some accounts with your bank. You were recommended to me as an establishment that could also securely store some valuable possessions for me. Are you able to do that?”

Bartholomew looked somewhat surprised.

“My Lord, that would depend on the type and size of those possessions.”

“Ah, yes, of course. As I have recently come from France, and my family’s lands and holdings suffered badly in the wars, most of my wealth is in small portable items of value – like gems. I wish to place a selection of such items on deposit with you, as security against access to ready funds, until I have established my household here, and can arrange further sale of those items.”

The banker's eyes gleamed – it appeared that he could quite successfully imagine the scale of wealth which could be transported in such a form.

“I believe that we can meet your requirements, my Lord. We have recently installed what I believe to be the most secure facility in London, and our building is guarded continuously.”

The discussion continued for some time, Jacques was given a tour of the building, and, satisfied, showed Bartholomew the gems, and saw them locked away.

A detailed list had been made, documenting each stone or item of jewellery, and its size and colour. The list was then copied, and Jacques kept a copy. He deposited part of the money he had received from the jeweller, and established an agreement with the banker with respect to the funds he could draw upon at any time – a rather astounding and pleasing amount, as it happened.

He departed the bank, now a respected and valued customer, and turned his steps in the direction of the address he had been provided for a suitable man of business. A Mr Swithin – the maid at the Chesterfield Inn had assured him that Swithin was retained by a number of members of the aristocracy, and that she had never heard a bad word about the man.

Given the scale of the maid's information on other men, that seemed a recommendation of the highest order.

Now that he knew how his funds stood, he could look to finding a house – somewhere just large enough, and just respectable enough, to be acceptable to the *ton*, yet not impossible to fund or support. He dared not think too far ahead, yet part of him wanted to see a future where he had found Colette, and where, perhaps, he might even eventually reclaim his lands in France. But now, a home, and his search for Colette had to be his focus.

He caught Mr Swithin just as he was about to close up his office for the day, and go home. Jacques half expected to be turned away at that point, yet Swithin simply smiled and asked him in. The office was warm, the fire only just banked for the night, and the chair he was shown to was comfortable.

“Mr Swithin, you have been recommended to me as a man of business with an impeccable reputation. I am the Marquis de Beaumarais. I have recently arrived from France, and I am in need of a man of business – someone that I can work with on a long-term basis. I have established myself with a banker, but I am in most desperate need of assistance to find, and acquire, a suitable residence, and then to pursue the recovery of much of my property in France. “

Mr Swithin watched him with the bright-eyed curiosity of a bird, and nodded at his words.

“The acquisition of a house I can certainly help you with. The other – well, that will be a more complex matter, as I am sure you are aware. But I have contacts who could help. Perhaps it is best that you tell me more of both your history, and your requirements, so that I can best assess how to assist. May I offer you a glass of port whilst we talk, to ward off some of the winter chill?”

“Indeed, that would be most pleasant, Monsieur Swithin.”

They settled to talk, and Jacques, although hesitant at first, found himself speaking freely with Mr Swithin. There was just something about the man. By the time he left, as the day was turning into darkness, he had been assured that there would be houses for him to inspect within a few days, even given the Christmas season, and that Mr Swithin would begin careful investigation into the status of his lands in France. For, unless they had been officially given over to a new owner, during the turmoil of war and the changes in politics and power, it was possible that they might yet return to his care.

Heartened, he walked back towards the Chesterfield Inn, well satisfied with his day.



## *Chapter Six*

Darkness was falling as Colette finally left the Chesterfield Inn. Two warm meals and an afternoon of varied conversations had done much to chase away her sadness – at least for a while. She carried with her a parcel, with more food to see her through the long evening, and to provide a hearty breakfast the following morning.

Gathering her cloak about her, she glanced along the street before as she reached the point where she would turn to go towards her home. In the distance, a man, dressed fashionably, well muffled in a rich winter coat and a scarf, walked along, moving with an almost jaunty stride. He passed under the glow of a lamp and the yellow light glinted on his raven dark hair, where it escaped, a little, from the hat and scarf.

Her breath caught – the way that he moved, so confident, so strong. For a moment, she was sure that it was Jacques. But no, surely she was being silly, as she had been so many times before, seeing him in every man who had dark hair, in every man who moved with confidence, only to be disappointed when they came closer, and were revealed to be no one she had met before. She could not bear the thought of that feeling again. She hurried on, turning the corner, wanting the quiet, and the privacy of her home, as the old grief rushed through her again.

She let herself in, and went up to her rooms, placing the bag of food on the table before unwrapping her cloak and scarf from her shoulders, and hanging them on the hooks near the door. As she turned back to the room, she caught her own reflection in the small mirror which hung on the wall.

Even in the dim light of the room, the emerald at her throat glowed, as if lit from within. She remembered the day that Jacques had given it to her. It had been his mother's, and graced many a Marquise de Beaumarais before her. It symbolised all of his love for her – and everything that they had lost. Her fingers went to it, and her dark eyes misted with tears again.

She untied her bonnet, and added it to the items on the hooks, then, pulling the pins from her hair, she shook her head.

Running her fingers through the cascade of blond curls released, she shook the sadness aside, and went to build up the fires, to distract herself with domesticity. Perhaps she would allow herself to embroider – to work on the handkerchief which she had slowly embroidered these past four years – a piece intended for Jacques, should he live, should he ever find her. She could not bear to work on it for long, and she refused to let her tears fall on it and stain the cloth. Perhaps, this year, she would finish it.



Jacques had almost reached the Inn when a movement on the street ahead of him caught his eye. It was a woman, wrapped in a cloak, and carrying something. She was small, like his Colette, and quick on her feet. She paused a moment, then hurried on, turning into a side street, obviously wishing to get home and out of the cold.

He had thought, for a moment there, that he beheld Colette – but what was the probability of that? Very low, he thought – just wishful thinking.

He turned his thoughts to the Inn, and a warm meal in the comfort of his private parlour.

Tomorrow, he would seek out this modiste, and discover if the name meant anything, or if it was merely coincidence.

He dared not hope that it might, actually, be Colette – for if he allowed hope, and it was not, he could not bear the pain of losing that hope. With food and warmth, he slept well, valuing such simple things as he never had, until he had spent four long years living in a simple cottage, with barely enough to survive.

It seemed he had barely closed his eyes, when the tap on the door informed him that it was morning, and the maids come to build up the fire. Stretching, he rose, and readied himself for the day. He was nervous – the thought that he might see Colette, might hold her and touch her again, sent shivers through him – of fear, and of anticipation.

He had just finished breaking his fast when another knock at the door heralded a man, bearing a stack of boxes from the tailor. Once everything was unpacked, and he was certain that all he had ordered was there, he sent the man down to the taproom with some money for an ale before he departed. He was, a little, beginning to feel like a Lord again, now that he had the clothes to suit his station, and a source of funds. He had not known that he missed it, until it was restored to him.

It seemed unreal to him, that it was Christmas Eve, that he was in England, and that he no longer needed to hide.

As he prepared himself to set out in search of the modiste, another messenger came to his door – this time from Mr Swithin.

“Good morning my Lord, Mr Swithin asks if you are available, immediately, to inspect a property which he believes may suit your purposes?”

Jacques blinked at the man a moment, startled. He had, obviously, made a good choice, for such efficiency was to be valued.

“Most certainly. I was about to go out. Am I to meet Mr Swithin at his office?”

“No, my Lord – I will take you straight to the property, and Mr Swithin will meet us there.”

“Lead on then.”



The house was in a quiet square, not far from the most fashionable addresses, but perhaps, on the whole, a little run down. Still, at first sight, it was appealing. It rose four floors from the street level, with a service floor below and an attic above. The style was simple, rather more old-fashioned than more recently built properties, yet elegant.

“There is a garden at the rear – not large, but well designed – and a stable with an entry from the rear lane.”

Mr Swithin’s man provided commentary as they waited on Mr Swithin’s arrival. Soon, a hackney drew up, and Mr Swithin alighted.

“My apologies for my tardiness, my Lord.”

Jacques waved the man’s apology away.

“It is not of issue – please, let us proceed.”

Mr Swithin withdrew a key from his pocket, and led the way up the stairs. The door creaked a little as it opened, and the slight musty scent of emptiness drifted around them as they entered. Their footsteps echoed on the marble floor of the entryway, and small clouds of dust rose to drift in the air, gilded by the weak winter sun which shone through the fanlight above the door.

“This house has been empty, this six months past. It belonged to a widow, who lived to a great age, it having been part of her dowry in the first place. The great grand-daughter, whom she had willed it to, died in childbirth, not a day after the old woman herself died. And, as she had specified that it might only pass to a daughter of her line, there was much consternation. In the end, the family decided to sell it, and put the funds in trust for the next female child – for the girl who died left only a son.”

Mr Swithin led the way through the hall, to show Jacques a parlour, decorated in shades of blue, with a collection of chairs and couches.

“It is furnished – good quality pieces, if a little eccentric in style – you could, of course, easily sell any of them, and replace them with pieces of your preference.”

“I find this a quite charming room, actually.”

“Good, then let us proceed with the rest of the house.”

By the time they had seen all floors, and all rooms, as well as the garden and stables, Jacques was a little dusty, but elated – it was exactly the sort of house he had hoped for. Large enough to show him a man of consequence, with room for anything he and Colette might wish – including, should they be so blessed, children. He thought himself a fool for thinking such things, when he had not even found her, yet he could not stop the thought from appearing.

They discussed price, and Jacques was relieved that the figure Mr Swithin thought likely was lower than he had feared. He gave his authority for Mr Swithin to negotiate the sale, and turned to go. Pausing, he turned back.

“Mr Swithin... This may seem an unusual question, but please, forgive me my eccentricity.”

“Of course, my Lord – what do you wish to ask me?”

“Do you, perchance, know the direction of a modiste, known as Madame Beaumarais?”

Swithin considered him, curiosity clear in his expression, then simply answered.

“Why yes, my Lord, I do. She is famous, and well loved. She makes beautiful gowns, and a number of my other clients go exclusively to her for their attire. Let me write down her address for you. I believe that she lives in rooms above her business premises. I think, if I have this right, that she owns the building.”

Swithin produced a pen and a small notebook from his pockets, and wrote, quickly and carefully, then handed the paper to Jacques.

“My thanks, Mr Swithin. I will expect to hear from you soon, with respect to the house.”

Bowing, they parted, and Jacques walked about the small square which might soon be his home, considering the neighbouring houses, and the small, yet well maintained park in the centre. The piece of paper in his hand was like a threat and a promise, rolled into one. It contained the chance of great joy, or great disappointment. Finally, he forced himself to seek a cab. It was time to find out if the modiste was Colette.



## *Chapter Seven*

Colette drifted into awareness, and lay in bed, luxuriating in there being no need to rise yet. She had dreamed, strange dreams full of snow, and glimpses of Jacques in the distance, followed by a dream in which they were together, dressed in all the finery of the nobility, at a Ball or some such, as if their old life had never changed. Part of her longed for that to be real, but... she was shocked to realise that, even though she wished, more than anything else, to have Jacques at her side, she no longer wished so much for that life.

She had built her business, doing work that she enjoyed, giving women the gift of looking their best. Even if she could take up her old life, she would not want to lose this. It was good, then, that it was a choice she was unlikely to ever have to make.

Although... perhaps it was not a choice – after all, Lady Serafine had managed to move back into society, and still keep her business, her husband was now an Earl, yet had not given up his extensive merchant empire. What if... if Jacques ever came, if their old life might ever be reclaimed, could it be possible for her to have both? She did not know – but she thought about it.

She lay there, considering this revelation, until hunger drove her to rise. She went to her dressing table, and sat to brush out her hair, and pin it up for the day. Her determined curls, so fine that they sometimes looked as if they had been created by hours of crimping and twisting with heated tongs, had, as usual, tangled into knots. As she reached for the brush, her gaze fell upon the handkerchief, where she had laid it down the previous night. It was finished. The curls of holly and winter roses picked out in tiny stitches, twined around her initials linked with Jacques', glowed with colour against the pale cloth. He might never see it, but she was glad that she had made it. Perhaps she should frame it. But no, she could not – for that would be to admit that he might never come.

She turned her eyes away, and lifted the brush, patiently untangling her curls, brushing them until they were smooth and shone, and pinned them up in an elegant roll on her head, with just carefully placed wisps loose around her face.

She studied herself. Did she look old? She was but thirty, yet felt far older. She had tried to look older, to create an aura of authority to her customers – now, she was not sure that she wished to look so. But what did it matter. There was no one for her to look young for. There would be no long years together, no children. She picked up the necklace, and fastened it in place, her fingers cupping the stone a moment, then she released it, and pushed her maudlin thoughts aside.

Once she had eaten, she gathered up her cloak and scarf, and tied her bonnet on. Time to purchase food for the next few days, for she would not go out on Christmas Day. Today was Christmas Eve, when, had they still lived their old life in France, they would have been celebrating the holiday – the English did so on the actual day, not on Christmas Eve – so she had two days each year in which her heart ached for the empty space where Jacques should have been. She could come to hate the time of year, even though most people loved the celebrations.

Out on the street, doors had been decorated with wreaths of greenery and red berries, and everyone was cheerful. She made herself smile and talk as if all was well, and went about her business. It did not take long to purchase what she needed, and she retreated to her rooms, glad to be away from the unrelenting happiness.

Once her food was stored away, she took herself down to the workroom, and set about tidying, and cleaning, readying the space for the return of her workers in the following week. Being busy helped, so the room always got an extreme cleaning at this time of year.

She changed the display in her front window, and was about to go up to prepare herself some luncheon, when a knock came at the door. She stilled, frozen by the surprise of it. No-one called on her, certainly not at this time of year, when the closed sign was firmly displayed. For some unknown reason, her heart beat harder, and her breath came short. She felt, in that instant, afraid to open the door, as if doing so would change something, utterly.



Jacques had become steadily more agitated as the cab rattled over the cobbles of the London streets, carrying him ever closer to the moment of truth. His every fear and doubt surfaced in his mind. What if it was Colette, but she had given up hope of him long ago? What if she had found comfort in the arms of another man? What would he do? What if it was not Colette, and he had to search for new clues to her location? What if he searched for years, and never found her?

The thoughts chased each other, relentlessly trampling his hopes to dust. He had never felt such fear in his life, not even when war surrounded them, and survival was uncertain. Finally, the interminable journey ended. He stepped down from the cab, paid the driver, and turned to consider the building before him.

It was of brick, well-built and simple of façade, similar to those adjoining it. The street level of each building appeared to be business premises of some kind – other seamstresses, purveyors of laces and fabrics, feathers and accessories, a cobbler, a shop specialising in travelling trunks – it was all aimed, he could see, at the very wealthiest of customers. The window before him displayed two beautiful gowns, quite the most intricate and elegant that he had ever seen. A sign hung above the closed door, which simply said, in a plain script, 'Madame Beaumarais – Modiste'. On the door itself, a small sign declared 'closed'.

He took a deep breath, and lifted his shaking hand to knock. The sound echoed, and he wondered, for a moment, if the place was empty. He waited. He knocked again. Then he heard it. Footsteps – light, slow, almost uncertain, but coming to the door.

His heart thundered as loudly as his knock had, moments before. The lock clicked, and turned.

The door moved, slowly, for it was solid and heavy. Jacques almost closed his eyes, afraid to see.

But he could not. He simply stood, staring, as the door was pushed aside, and dark eyes met his. He was drowning, he was floating, there was nothing but those eyes, that face, with wisps of blond hair curling around it, and those lips, lips that he had dreamed of for four long years, open in a gasp of astonishment.

Then he moved, stepping through the door, sweeping her into his arms. His lips met hers, and she clung to him, tears on her cheeks, and all the despair and longing of years in her kiss.

Minutes passed, and he came to his senses enough to kick the door closed behind him, shutting out the chill wind and the drifting snowflakes which had begun to fall. When, finally, they drew apart a little, he looked at her, and found himself lost for words.

“Colette...”

“Jacques... I feared... I feared that you would never come. Yet I never stopped hoping.”

He kissed her again, action being far easier than words, as a way of expressing his feelings. She sighed, and melted against him, the tension of years released. Then she looked up, almost shyly.

“Let me lock the door again, and we can go up to my chambers – there is warmth, and food, and drink.”

He nodded, releasing her, and watched, bemused, as she dealt with the door, and turned to lead him up the stairs. This competent self-possessed woman was his Colette, and yet she was more, had grown, these four years, become stronger. At the top of the stairs, she led him through another door, and up again, into a cosy room.

He sat on her couch, and allowed her to fuss over him, bringing food and drink. When she finally settled beside him, there was a silence. He drank her in with his eyes, noticing the emerald about her neck, that he had given her, all those years before. To him, she looked no older – she was as beautiful as ever.

“Colette, my love, I would have come sooner but, Phillipe...” his face crumpled as the grief overcame him again, and she reached for his hand, clinging to him. “He is dead. I saved him from them, but he was so hurt, he never truly became whole again. His body was weak, he never became strong enough that I could have risked travelling with him, and this winter was more than he could stand. A consumption took him. I am ashamed to admit that I was, in the end, relieved that he was gone, for it freed me. Freed me to come to you.”

She lifted his hand and kissed it, her eyes on his, seeing the reflection of his memories in their depths.

“There is nothing to be ashamed of, my darling Jacques, you did all that you could – far more than many men would have done.”

He straightened, and pulled her to him, simply holding her, breathing her scent, letting the warmth of her body against his convince him that she was real. If he could, he would stay like this forever, and never release her again. After a little, though, she pulled back, hesitated a moment, then seemed to come to a decision.

“Jacques, I must ask – what of our estates, what of Chateau Beaumarais?” He sighed, looking sad.

“Chateau Beaumarais suffered, as we feared. It is half ruined. But my preparations worked. The cellar remained undiscovered. I recovered the gems and jewels, and I sold the paintings to Monsieur Villeneuve. He will collect them, a little at a time, and sell them, to a buyer in England, somewhere – he gave me a great deal of money for them, which is how I come to be here, well dressed – and in the process of buying a house. There are other things in the cellar – if he can sell them, he will, or he will hold them for us.”



“Buying a house?”

“Yes. I intend, here, to be myself again – I have already begun to be openly the Marquis de Beaumarais. I have employed a man of business, who came well recommended, and he believes that, given time, we may be able to recover some of our lands in France. If it never happens, so be it, we will make our lives here, but if it does... I would like to see the Chateau, at least, restored.”

Jacques watched as Colette stilled, looking very uncertain, and waited for her to speak. When she did, her voice was shaky, almost afraid.

“Jacques, I also would like to see the Chateau restored, for I have many fond memories of it. But... to be ourselves, after years of hiding. I am not sure how to be that person any more. I have built myself a life here, and a successful business. I know that it is not something the aristocracy here, or in France, regard as appropriate, yet... I would not want to give it up. I could step back, and let my employees do more of the work, but I would still wish to design clothes. I have come to see many of my clients as friends – and they, I think, at least some of them, would welcome me in society, would welcome us. One of them, at least, is also in business. But... can you understand, could you accept that?”

Jacques stared at her, amazed. His Colette had, indeed, become stronger, had done so much more than simply survive. Her words shocked him, yet made him proud.

“I had not considered such a possibility. Yet... I see no reason we should not do such a thing. I have spent four years as an ordinary man – my respect for those who work has increased as a result. And Colette, I am in awe of what you have achieved. I feared that you would suffer, that you might be taken advantage of by the unscrupulous of the world – yet here you are, flourishing, strong and clever. I would not take that from you, even if it means we are ignored by some of society.”

She let out a huge sigh, and collapsed into his arms.

“I was so scared that you would be horrified, and forbid it.”

Her whisper sounded soft against his neck, and he tilted her face up to find tears in her eyes and on her cheeks. He kissed them away.

“My darling, neither of us are as we once were. I believe that, for all we have been through, we are better, stronger.”

She smiled, and looked around her, as if suddenly seeing her home anew.

“Jacques, where have you been staying?”

“The Chesterfield Inn.”

She laughed, a bright happy sound, with the slightest brittle edge to it.

“I ate my meals there yesterday – it’s a wonder we did not meet.”

“Aahhh! Perhaps I was not dreaming. I saw a woman, just for a second, and thought it you – then I told myself that it was my desire to find you making me see things!”

The laughter came again, cleaner, happier.

“Then, my darling, I suggest that you go there now, and collect your belongings. This may not be so imposing as whatever house you intend to buy – but it is mine, so ours, and I can think of no better gift this Christmas season than to have you here in my arms.”

He swept her into a kiss again, then reluctantly released her.

“I will go at once, and let the Inn know to forward any messages here.”



Once he had left, Colette stood in her parlour, joyous laughter bubbling up in her throat. She flung her arms out, and spun around, until she collapsed, dizzied, onto the couch. He was here, he had come for her after all!

A thought struck her, and she leapt up, and rushed up to her bedchamber, gathering the handkerchief up from the dressing table. Looking at the picture of Chateau Beaumarais, where it hung on her wall, she made it a promise – those things hidden in its walls had just given her life back – she would do her best to see it brought back to life too.

Waiting, she sat in the parlour, the embroidered handkerchief on her lap, and consider the next months. It would be hard, at first, admitting to all of her customers how she had hidden her true identity from them. But most would forgive her. And Lady Serafine, oh, the Countess of Porthaven – would she never get used to thinking of her that way? - would help, for she truly understood the challenges Colette was about to face.

Truly, she was fortunate, in all parts of her life!

## *Epilogue*

Two days after Christmas, Colette and Jacques walked into their new house. She exclaimed in delight at some parts of it, and instantly declared the need to redecorate others. Jacques laughed, pleased with her confidence, and the obvious pleasure she took in her skill with such things. When they reached the upper floors, he opened a final door, and ushered her in to an empty room. She looked at him, puzzled.

“And this, my darling Colette, will, I hope, one day soon, be a nursery.”

His eyes darkened with the promise of passion as he spoke, and she felt herself flush, her body heating at all that was implied by those words. He gathered her into his arms, and kissed her, there in the empty sun-filled room.

Minutes passed, or hours, and neither of them cared – they had years of time apart to make up for.

Later, in the kitchens, he dusted off a chair for her, using the handkerchief she had laboured over for four years, its presence on his person a reminder, always of her faithfulness and belief in him. She sat, and contemplated the room around her.

“We will need a cook. How strange it will be, to have household staff again.”

“And we will need maids, and footmen, a housekeeper and a butler. For I intend us to entertain, to become known amongst society.”

“Let us start with a dinner party, perhaps in a few weeks, when many people are back in town?”

“An excellent suggestion – do you have a guest list in mind?”

“Oh, I do, I do – my favourite clients are about to become our first guests.”

And so, it began.



Shelton, the butler, opened the door for the first guests.

He was as nervous as his employers. He had been given a wonderful opportunity in this role, and he intended to do his best. On the doorstep waited the Earl and Countess of Porthaven, the Earl's sister, Miss Isabella Morton, and her betrothed, the Duke of Hartswood. Shelton ushered them in, the footman took their outer garments, and he led them to the parlour.

For a moment, Colette felt like fleeing in terror, for this was the turning point. She stiffened her spine, chastised herself internally, and stepped forward with a smile. The Countess stepped forward too, and swept Colette into a hug.

"My dear – what must I call you now? I am so delighted at your news – I cannot imagine the pain you must have felt, to be separated from your husband for four long years!"

"Oh please, let us not be formal – please call me Colette – and this," she waved him forward, "is my husband, Jacques."

"I am so pleased to meet you, Jacques. Please call me Sera. I spent more than a year away from society, and I fear that I became utterly used to informality."

Further introductions proceeded, and the evening flowed smoothly, all nervousness and concern forgotten in good conversation and laughter. When Jacques relayed the story of his return to England, Sera laughed, delighted.

“Oh, I am sorry for my laughter, Jacques, but it is funny. My business is an art gallery – I am not sure if Colette told you – and I have just received a shipment of paintings. From Monsieur Villeneuve. I am, from what you say, quite certain that they came, originally, from Chateau Beaumarais.”

They joined her in laughter.

“I am, then, delighted to hear where they have ended up. If you wish, I can give you details of their provenance and their subjects, if that is of interest to you?”

“It is, indeed. And I believe that you have just solved a puzzle for me.”

“Oh?”

“Monsieur Villeneuve sent one extra painting. It came wrapped differently, and with a note. The note said that I should not sell it, but that I should gift it to someone. That he was quite sure I would know who should receive it when I met them. It had another envelope with it, simply addressed to ‘the gift recipient’. I do believe that I am supposed to give it to you. I cannot wait. Let me send Alf to collect it now.”

The coachman was dispatched to the gallery, with detailed instructions, and, as they finished dining, appeared at the door again. He was puffing under the weight of a huge painting.



The all went into the parlour, and Alf set the painting down, then bowed himself out. Jacques looked at it, almost afraid to unwrap the oilcloth from about it. Colette was not so afraid. She stepped forward, and began the unwrapping. Jacques joined her, and soon it was revealed.

The picture, fully five feet tall and four wide, was a family portrait. It showed three generations – Jacques and Phillipe as boys, their father and mother, and their father's parents. Jacques eyes misted with tears. It had always been his favourite portrait, for everyone looked happy, and it was a remarkable likeness – far better than any other portrait of anyone in it.

“What does the letter say?”

Colette's voice brought him back from memory. He opened it, and read. Then he went to the painting, where it leant against the wall, and turned it around, carefully examining the back of it. In one spot, he pressed carefully, and the panel at the back slid away, revealing a hidden compartment. Layered inside, there were papers – many papers. Carefully, Jacques slipped them out, then closed the panel again.

Settling onto the couch he spread them out beside him. Silence filled the room, as everyone waited. When he looked up, his eyes were shining.

He reached for Colette's hand, and she went to him.

"The deeds to every one of our estates. Bank notes for every place that my father and grandfather ever invested or stored funds. A chart of our family bloodlines. Deeds to a trust that my father had established for Phillippe and I – which I did not know existed. This is everything we need to reclaim our estates, and far more – if even half of these investments and deposits are still recoverable, we are far wealthier than I ever imagined being. Bless my father's forethought. He must have put these there, as soon as war became persistent, more than 15 years ago. He knew I loved this painting – he must have hoped that this would be something I would save, no matter what happened."

Colette knelt before him, and he wrapped her in his arms, scattering the papers aside.

"This, my darling, is the most blessed Christmas of my life."

"And of mine."

Ignoring the audience, Jacques kissed her, then, releasing her, stood, tidied the precious papers into a neat pile, and called for brandy for a celebratory drink

## The End

**If you enjoyed this story, I hope that you'll read the rest of my 'His Majesty's Hounds' series (you'll find various characters from this book in many of the other books)**

## *About the Author*

Arietta Richmond has been a compulsive reader and writer all her life. Whilst her reading has covered an enormous range of topics, history has always fascinated her, and historical novels have been amongst her favourite reading.

She has written a wide range of work, from business articles and other non-fiction works (published under a pen name) but fiction has always been a major part of her life. Now, her Regency Historical Romance books are finally being released. The Derbyshire Set is comprised of 10 novels (7 released so far). The 'His Majesty's Hounds' series is comprised of 14 novels, with the tenth having just been released.

She also has a standalone longer novel shortly to be released, and two other series of novels in development.

She lives in Australia, and when not reading or writing, likes to travel, and to see in person the places where history happened.

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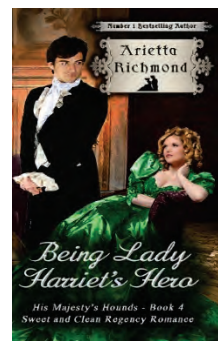
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When you do, you will receive a free copy of the subscriber exclusive novella '**A Gift of Love**', a prequel to the Derbyshire Set series, which ends on the day that 'The Earl's Unexpected Bride' begins

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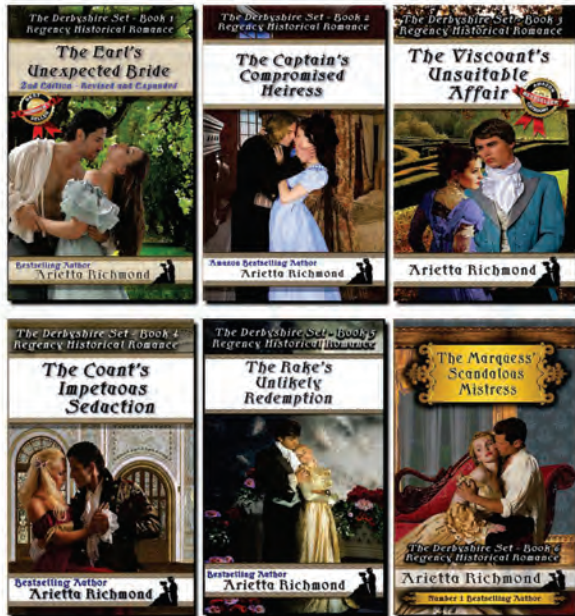
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