



## Moonlight Masquerade

*Ruth Axtell*

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Lady Celine Wexham seems the model British subject. French by birth but enjoying life in 1813 as a widowed English countess, she is in the unique position of being able to help those in need--or to spy for the notorious Napoleon Bonaparte. When Rees Phillips of the British Foreign Office is sent to pose as the countess's butler and discover where her true loyalties lie, he is confident he will uncover the truth. But the longer he is in her fashionable townhouse in London's West End, the more his staunch loyalty to the Crown begins to waver as he falls under Lady Wexham's spell. Will he find the proof he needs? And if she is a spy after all, will he do the right thing?

## **Moonlight Masquerade Details**

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Author : Ruth Axtell

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## From Reader Review Moonlight Masquerade for online ebook

### Anne says

*Moonlight Masquerade* takes you straight at the heart of Lady Céline Wexham's household, where intrigue confronts attraction, and loyalties confront love. Rees Phillips has been assigned a spying mission for the British, and poses as Lady Wexham's butler to discover if she is spying for the French. Separated by social and political barriers, Rees and Céline nevertheless develop a sparkling attraction for each other, and Rees's mission soon takes a turn towards protecting Lady Wexham instead of reporting her to authorities. Both characters were strong, interesting, well-developed and their chemistry was very well portrayed. It was fascinating to see the lady of the house fall for her butler and vice versa.

I liked how this novel wasn't a typical Regency romp, full of rout parties, assemblies at Almack's and morning callers, but instead focused a lot on the upstairs/downstairs aspect of a respectable lady living in London high society. There were many moving and heart-wrenching moments, where both lead characters struggled to make the right decisions, as they were torn between their loyalty to their respective countries and the person who held their heart. The masquerade scene was enchanting, and I read it many times over.

Overall this book had everything I enjoy; intrigue, suspense, adventure, a dashing hero and a courageous, intelligent heroine, heartwarming romance and sizzling chemistry. I look forward to reading the second book of the series, *A Heart's Rebellion*, and discover what Jessamine's story will be!

Buddy read with Tweety, Maria and Ceri :)

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### Sarah says

A real page turner that kept me reading. Regency and spies is a great mix. While there were a couple of things that weren't great about the book (girl dressing up as a guy for some unexplained reason, more physical attraction than character) I really enjoyed this Regency romp.

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### Casey says

With the new fad of Downton Abbey (and I'm speaking as an avid fan myself), it seems there will probably be a great many more regencies showing up on the Christian fiction market. But what I liked about "Moonlight Masquerade" is that it doesn't have to fit any one "mold" or expectation. The story was fresh, interesting and engaging.

I liked the "espionage" angle and it is definitely one of those upstairs/downstairs relationships with a twist that I wasn't sure the two main characters could actually fall in love. Amazing, considering they are the main characters. (wink)

I love titles that actually match a scene within the story and the masquerade under moonlight is definitely one such moment. Oh goodness...talk about a good fiction moment.

Parts of the story weren't \*as\* engaging as far as the actual telling of the story and I thought parts a bit repetitive, but overall the story was one I'm still glad I took the time to read.

Several sections during the story bore a delightful smidge of humor. Secondary characters had strength beyond the page and gave delightful spice to the story. I enjoyed reading the progression and character growth. An overall entertaining read.

This review is my honest opinion. Thanks to the publishers for my copy to review

\*\*Available March 2013 from Revell, a division of Baker Publishers\*\*

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### **Tweety says**

Well, I finished despite Rees, and because of Céline.

I found Rees tiresome. If only we could have known a bit about his past! Not cold, hard facts but experiences. Because we don't ever really know his past I didn't understand him. What made him do and say the things he did? I understood and liked Céline as we did get to know her experiences in life.

The first three pages are page-grippers, the middle is un-put-down-able. But all the in between, let's just say I say that came to the sudden conclusion that my overcrowded book cases needed to be re-organized and that my cat's eye really didn't look to good, so let me go put a tea bag on it. However, don't get me wrong, the intrigue was wonderful, despite the slow patch.

I'm torn, I love the suspense this author *can* infuse into the story, but all in all I didn't love this book. I think the best scene in the entire book was with the Highwaymen, what could be better than Rees being shot?

Perfectly clean, two kisses in the entire book and the most detail we got was his fingers in her hair. G Rating.

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### **Melissa says**

I enjoyed so much about this book. It had some great complex characters. The story line pulls you in, trying to figure out what is going on. The writing is well done. The Christian elements were light not overtaking the book or the story line just a nice add in. It held some great romantic tension between these two. The three stars are given because it lost some of its magic because it drug on too long. In an effort to keep the tension going between these two the author drug the book out for me and it lost it's spark. The ending also fell a little flat for me. Everything wrapped up nicely I just wish these two would have gotten the ending the whole book pulled you too. This was very clean, there was talk marriage and intimacy but it is light and in no way detailed.

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### **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

This is one of those Kindle freebies I popped down in an evening or two when I was supposed to be reading Better Stuff. Squeaky clean inspirational Regency (the hero is a 31-year-old *virgin*, y'all! How often do you see that in a romance?) mixed with rather confusing scenes of spying, wrapped in a ~~mystery inside an enigma~~ lots of discussion about prayer and finding God. The religious talk seemed vaguely evangelical, which doesn't match up all that well with my understanding of the prevailing religious beliefs in England in the early 1800's, and--even though I'm a religious person myself--I got tired of reading that the hero was praying about everything. I also thought the spying parts were confusing and not adequately explained (a key plot point was the difference was between the various French political factions). That might have been because sheer boredom was causing me to start skimming at that point, but I make no apologies for that.

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### **Michelle says**

Closer to 4.5 stars.

This is the first book I've read by this author and I really enjoyed this Regency. The era when Napoleon waged war with the rest of the world is a fascinating time in history. I liked the French and English settings in the book and the theme of spying for either side in the midst of war. This was well done. The tension was so delicious it was even palpable at times.

I read this book in a few days. The best part was probably the setting. It had a definite Regency feel to it, but that was what I wanted. There have been other Regency novels that I've read in the past that didn't feel nearly as authentic when it came to the setting. Somehow the author even made the romance believable. The difference between stations was no easy hurdle, but it worked the way she put it all together.

Oh, speaking of romance, there was a lot of tension between characters. Though they didn't have much physical contact, you could feel the pull between them. And when they did kiss, well, fireworks went off in the background. Okay, that's a bit of an overly dramatic description, but the kisses were intense enough to melt my heart. I wanted them to be together despite their many obstacles. The hero was a good guy and he did the right thing. The faith element was believable as well and I found myself quite inspired by it. All in all, a very good read. I would definitely recommend it to Regency lovers.

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### **Ceri says**

This is a Christian historical romance, set in 1813. Rees Phillips is working in London for the Home Office. He's posing as Lady Wexham's butler under the pseudonym of Mackinnon, trying to discover if she is a spy for Napoleon. Lady Wexham is a young widow of a much older husband, who she married at her mother's behest. She is a French émigré and she is, in fact, spying for Napoleon. Her reason for supporting him is partly that she sees Napoleon as a better leader for France's future than the alternative of restoring the royal family and partly because her life feels quite empty.

Lady Wexham and Rees have a mutual attraction very early on. Lady Wexham's maid, Valentine, is suspicious of Rees and tells her employer. Both Lady Wexham and Rees are hoping against hope that the other isn't a spy, but as time goes on each becomes convinced that their fears are true.

*'Why was there this yearning in her heart for something genuine and honest from him?'*  
From Lady Wexham's point of view, although she doesn't view Rees in the same way as she views her other servants, because she knows he isn't one, she has quite an egalitarian view of others, so that's less of an issue for her. However, if he finds out the truth about her she could hang.

Rees is even more conflicted; he is tempted to put his growing allegiance for Lady Wexham before his allegiance to his country and he knows that she is very far above him socially.

*'The woman fascinated him more than ever. What other highborn lady would spend an hour talking with a servant? Was it because she was indeed a French Republican, seeing no class difference between the two – or was it that she knew he was no butler? More likely the latter.'*

In addition to this, his faith is very important to him and he is unsure of how virtuous Lady Wexham is - he knows that she doesn't attend church, but he doesn't know whether she has taken lovers. This is not something that Rees would be able to overlook.

As time goes on, Rees realises that Lady Wexham is in danger from another source and his attempts to protect her brings them closer together. He comes to understand some of her political views and she tries to reconcile her idea of the God that she feels abandoned by with Rees's view of a loving, guiding God. Both of them know that there can't be any future together...

*'They were enemies. Repeating the facts did nothing to strengthen his commitment. It only filled his soul with a bleak desolation as he watched her perform the steps of a minuet.'*

I thought this was an interesting premise for a story, and it highlighted parts of history that I was ignorant of previously, such as the fact that there was a court of French royalists in Buckinghamshire. Obviously since Rees was working as a butler his movements would be constrained by the demands and the limits of acting in that role, but I felt that the author worked hard to make any deviations from the role of the butler as plausible as possible, such as Rees accompanying Lady Wexham on her visit to Hartwell House, which you wouldn't expect a butler to do.

I loved the romance between Lady Wexham and Rees. It was so restrained because of all the barriers between them, neither of them is even sure that the romance isn't just one-sided, so it's all glances and internal emotions, which was wonderful.

*'Perhaps the only words that could be communicated to each other were to be silent ones.'*

This is a Christian book, which you wouldn't really notice for a while. I am new to reading Christian fiction but I am not sure how well Rees's faith fitted with the job he was doing and although this is mentioned I felt he seemed a bit blasé about this conflict, which in some respects didn't fit with his character when you consider how he angst about how good a Christian Lady Wexham was. Rees asked God for guidance and support more and more as the story progressed, and so the Christian aspect of the story increased as time went on.

The only real issue I had with this book was that to me, it felt more modern than the period. Things like the language used – not just individual words that were out of place, but the feel and flow of the sentences felt distinctly too modern to me. Also, some of the behaviour I am not sure was in keeping with the times, such as the familiarity between Jessamine and Rees, the fact that he was writing to her to me implies a commitment towards her that doesn't seem to be the case. I also felt that the pacing of the storytelling really sped up at the end and it seemed a little rushed to me. However, I enjoyed this book and I'd recommend it.

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## Celestial says

This book to me was very hard to get into. I have to say I generally like this mysterious type of book where the main characters are spies during a war. For some reason however I just didn't like this book. To me this felt like a romance novel. I know it is supposed to be romantic, but as I read this story it kind of felt like I was reading a cheesy paperback romance novel with the hot man and woman on the cover.

I will say that I don't remember any inappropriate romance in it, however I did read it a while ago. All I can recall is a few passionate kisses. To me the romance was kinda cliché, classic rogue man falling in love with a beautiful seductive yet strong woman. I wasn't captivated by the thriller part either.

All in all this book was Meh. Not very good or worth reading.

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## Amanda Caldwell says

Moonlight Masquerade is a regency romance set in 1813 England. The story follows Lady Wexham a spy for France and her butler, Rees Phillips, who was placed in her household unbeknownst to her by The Home Office to keep an eye on her and determine whether or not she is a spy.

First of all, I am so happy to be done with this book. It took me about a week to finish it. The book is only 352 pages and I've finished books with this exact amount of pages in 2-3 days. This book got me so behind on my reading. I can't say it's entirely the book's fault, I didn't have the discipline to push through a mediocre book. So, obviously I wasn't a big fan of this one.

The book never held my attention, ever. I could read a few pages and I'd think I'd gotten really far and I'd check and only 2% of the book had passed. I couldn't believe that it progressed so slowly, it definitely became a chore to read. Maybe this was because I felt like the author always kept the reader at a far distance from the characters instead of bringing the reader into the character's hearts, souls, and minds. Even when one of the main characters got shot, I still did not care. I never got emotionally caught up in their story. Even the parts of the book that should have been exciting, never were. I really can't even pinpoint why this book never got intriguing, because with the storyline that it has, it definitely had potential to be a much better book.

Maybe I also didn't enjoy it because I never understood the politics in the book. Maybe I'm just very ignorant about British and French history. This is the reason I do read though, to learn while being entertained. But, even by the end of the book I still couldn't figure out if Lady Wexham was for or against what the British wanted. Were Rees and Celine spying for the same cause, but for different countries? Don't ask me, I have no idea! Was Celine the bad guy or not? Who knows! I wish the author would have found a better way to weave a bit of political history of those two countries and the war they were fighting at the time, because I was always confused. Maybe I should have done some research on Wikipedia prior to reading this book.

The author would also use terms that I wasn't familiar with and unlike how most authors will use a word that might be considered jargon or a colloquialism, and then explain it through context so the readers knows what the author is talking about... this author did not do that. She would use the word or phrase and just assume that everyone is such a history buff regarding the time period that they'd already know what she was talking

about. Many of the words she used I'd try looking up in the Kindle dictionary and there'd be no entry for them. Here's an example of a sentence found 59% into the book (I do not have page numbers for the ARC): "Digging into her reticule, she extracted her bottle of Hungary water."

Hungary water? Is that like special bottled water found only in Hungary? The author never explains, just assumes the reader is familiar with this water. Things like this pop up several times throughout the book. Again, maybe I'm just a big dummy, but I don't think so.

I am giving *Moonlight Masquerade* 2 out of 5 stars. I think that with a better writing style this book could have been much better. It was not terrible, but it's certainly not a book I'm going to miss.

I received an Advanced Reader Copy (ARC) of this book courtesy of NetGalley and Revell in exchange for a honest review.

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### **Carol says**

This was one of the best Regency romances I've read. There was lots of history, but it was woven into the plot seamlessly and didn't feel "tacked on." Sometimes you feel like you're reading a history book, but not this time. I liked that the romance wasn't "kitchy" - they didn't go weak in the knees every time they saw each other like sometimes novels have them do. Their romance grew in a believable but entertaining way.

Loved it!

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### **April Erwin says**

After reading *Moonlight Masquerade*, I've decided I need a butler. A tall, strapping, pious, manly, good looking butler. \*sigh\* Okay I'd rather he not be a butler or a spy necessarily, but goodness does Ruth Axtell know how to write a good character! Before you all pass this off as a fluff book though, let me get past my heart palpitations and tell you what else was great about this book.

Um. Everything? :) The connection between Celine and Rees is just the beginning, the tension that pulls you in and makes you want jump into the pages and shove the two together is palpable. Then there is the intrigue. Shadowy meetings. Spies following spies. Who do you trust and who has the right side of things? The politics were intriguing but never dry in my opinion and I enjoyed getting a closer look at the different factions that made up the rebellion in France. Napoleon wasn't the only one struggling for control. The glimpses between the royalists and their emigre court, and those that would see them left out of the government, was enlightening.

The book does end on a happy note, but I'll admit not in the way I expected. It was, however, just as satisfying and I love it when I don't always have things figured out from the very beginning. I like to enjoy the ride and *Moonlight Masquerade* was a VERY good ride... er, read. I look forward to it's sequel.

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### **Amber Stokes says**

*Moonlight Masquerade* took me back to England and France in the early 19th century, giving me a glimpse

of the the colorful costumes of spies, the intricate political dances of the time, and the beautifully decorated settings. The historical details are interesting and the writing is generally clean in style and structure. All this is to the story's credit.

Unfortunately, I felt like I was on the perimeter of the dance floor as I read, for the most part - watching events unfold and admiring certain qualities of the dancers, but not really swept up in the dance myself. The hero and heroine do have a lot going for them to endear them to the reader: they're intelligent and clever, but still emotionally "distracted" enough to add romance to their ambitions. Perhaps it was the lack of much insight into the true feelings of any of the secondary characters; perhaps it was the emphasis on the set-up and the chase vs. an emphasis on character development... But somehow I just didn't really get emotionally invested or overly interested in the story.

There are some exciting elements to the story, including an intriguing/sweet scene where the title ties into the plot, despite the sometimes plodding pace. However, the romance didn't overly thrill me, and in the end I didn't quite feel "in the know" about how the hero and heroine's actions and sacrifices made a difference in the overall historical scheme. There was just a disconnect between me and the story and its characters.

For those who enjoy books set in the Regency era - with details about the fashion, activities, and domestic issues of the upper class at that time - *Moonlight Masquerade* might draw you in. Perhaps it is a dance that some know the steps to, and others must only watch (which offers a slightly less pleasant experience than being involved oneself).

\*With thanks to Revell for providing me with a copy of the book in exchange for my honest opinion.\*

"Available March 2013 at your favorite bookseller from Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group."

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### **Maria says**

The only thing Rees Phillips wants, after he has spent several years working as junior clerk at the British Foreign Office, is to get a well-deserved promotion in order to take a wife and start his own family. Therefore, when he is asked to pose as a butler at Lady Céline Wexham's household to discover if she is a spy for Napoleon Bonaparte, he promptly accepts this new demanding task. He does not imagine that, besides the truth, he will find out more than he thought he would.

When I read the blurb of this book I thought it might be an interesting read. I did not expect I would enjoy it so much! Ruth Axtell's first book of the series "London Encounters" is indeed a beautiful story. The fact that two spies, working at the opposite sides and for opposite countries, find shared interests and because of their feelings, start to protect each other instead of report one another, is simply delightful! I loved the way the author depicted their personalities and their beliefs. I enjoyed the upstairs/downstairs relationship they had as countess and butler and I liked both their natures. Rees/Mr. MacKinnon calm, steady and resolute and Céline determined, brave and loyal to her emotions even though scared to be free to live following her own heart.

After a great start, typical of a spy story, I felt the plot slowed a bit to resume a good pace after chapter ten. This was, in my opinion, the moment when everything changed not only between the main characters but also in the explanation of the events. I was completely hooked and I could not put the book down without knowing if everything would be fine. The most breathtaking scene involved a holdup and a man who got shot! I cannot reveal any details because I cannot spoil your enjoyment but I found that moment amazingly

written. In the final part of the novel I felt a kind of slackening again, I had the impression there were some things which did not add anything special to the story and to the characters. While at a certain point I thought the moment I was waiting for since the beginning was about to come, it seemed it would never be real. It seemed as if it was not meant to be and it sounded a little far-fetched. That is why I felt a bit of disappointment and did not give it the highest rating.

Nevertheless, "Moonlight Masquerade" is a very good book I highly recommend to Historical Fiction lovers who also fancy a little mystery and spy stories! And I am looking forward to the next book of the series A Heart's Rebellion.

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### **QNPoohBear says**

2+ stars - not quite 3

This story of romance and intrigue is set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars. Rees Phillips is on loan from his job as a lowly clerk in the Foreign Office to the Home Office. He has been sent to spy on the young widow, Lady Exham, nee Celine de Beaumont. If he can find proof she's a French Bonapartist spy, he'll achieve a promotion and finally be able to marry. The problem is, Lady Wexham is very very beautiful and very kind. Can he keep his mind on his job and fight his growing attraction to his employer? Lady Celine Wexham is enjoying life as a young widow. Her marriage to a much older man was a disaster and she has no intentions of marrying again. She's been bored with her society life, so when a friend asked her to pass along information, she jumped at the chance. She has a cause she believes in and is willing to risk all to help. She suspects her new butler is not all he appears to be and that they are engaged in a cat and mouse game. She comes to care for this mysterious and handsome. Is it possible to do one's duty to God and country but also love the enemy? Who will come out ahead?

The first and last few chapters of this book are intriguing, but as it took me three nights to finish this book, it just wasn't compelling enough to really grip me. The middle of the book stalls the action to turn into a preachy moral tale debating religion and philosophy. I'm not sure what that's about since I skipped those discussions. They just didn't interest me. Despite the modern language (no one said "hello" in 1813), the period details in this novel are incredible! The author has done an excellent job researching the Regency era and incorporating little ordinary details into her story. She never stops to explain history or objects, something I am very grateful for. A novice to the genre probably should start with another book that's less descriptive, but as a long-time Regency fanatic, I loved the descriptive details. The intrigue in the story kept me wondering what would happen, especially 2/3 of the way through when the plot really picks up. The story is both too long and too short. The middle section is too long and the romantic plot should have been wrapped up in less words and more actions without an epilogue. The epilogue is too slow.

The characters in this novel are hit and miss. I absolutely adored Celine. She's brave, kind, and democratic - everything I admire in a heroine. I loved her so much and I wanted her to be happy. I think her fear at the end was a little out of place. It doesn't take much logic, despite the prevailing beliefs of the day. (Celine's fear is the historically correct opinion). I would have liked an epilogue that tells the reader what happens a few years later. Gaspard, the French chef, is also a good character. He's more than the typical temperamental French chef who usually appears in these novels.

The miss characters are Valentine, the stereotypical ladies' maid and of course Rees, our hero. Rees is a stuffy bore. He's 31, which was middle aged at the time, and never even kissed a woman. That's

extraordinarily unlikely given the time period. He spends too much time wondering what God wants, trying to please God and praying. He's just too stiff, boring and religious for me. It seems like the author went away too out of her way to create the anti-rake hero. He improves dramatically in the epilogue, enough to make the ending sweet, but I can't understand what Celine sees in him. He makes a nice change from the rakes but I love the Corinthians with rakish reputations. "I'd like it if he COULD be wicked, but wouldn't," to quote Anne Shirley.

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