



Captives of the Night

Loretta Chase

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When the intriguing Comte d'Esmond enters a room, women swoon and men gnash their teeth. The count is fully accustomed to this reaction and brilliant at exploiting it. What he isn't prepared for is Leila Beaumont. One look from her tawny eyes is dangerously captivating. How ... troublesome. Esmond can't afford the distraction of an entanglement, however passionate it promises to be. He's supposed to be working --- for the government! --- and his employers want Leila's corrupt and treacherous husband brought to justice. When the spouse, unsurprisingly and conveniently, gets himself murdered, all Esmond has to do is clear Leila of suspicion and proceed to the next assignment.

But not being hanged for her husband's murder isn't enough for Leila. She wants to learn the truth --- all of it --- from Esmond, a man who's been lying all his life.

Captives of the Night Details

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From Reader Review Captives of the Night for online ebook

Lady Wesley says

Kate Reading does her usual excellent job with this second volume of the Scoundrels series. Thoroughly enjoyable!

rameau says

This review can also be found on Book Girl of Mur-y-Castell-blog.

If you've read the blurb you know that this is a romantic mystery where Leila Beaumont is trying to find out who killed her father almost a decade ago and who is responsible for the recent death of her husband. Of course, she can't help but be tempted by the spy assigned to help her, Comte d'Esmond.

What you don't know is that *Captives of the Night* isn't quite like any other romance novel I've ever read before. It's a historical and it features a so called bad boy with a heart of gold, and those are things I love, but for a good part of the story the heroine spends married to someone other than the apparent love of her life. What's more curious, is that she freely admits having once loved her abusive and vile husband.

It's a delightfully realistic take on two people finding each other and giving themselves a second chance in happiness. Not everyone finds and marries the love of their life at seventeen and spend the rest of their lives together. There's a slight problem, though.

How does an author stop the heroine from becoming a contemptible doormat to an abusive husband while turning her into a possible adulteress and keep her relatable to an average romance reader?

The answer is, she doesn't. At least, Chase didn't. She made the Leila Beaumont into a violent tempered shrew who can stand up to her morally corrupt husband and whose tantrums lead to her being the suspect in her husband's murder. And that's how Chase handled the second part of her dilemma. Getting rid of an unwanted balls in chain (pun intended) was the only way for the true romance to move on.

I call it a true romance because it isn't magically easy. Both Esmond and Leila fight their attraction for each other instead of giving into their insta-lust. The sex part still comes quite early for an historical novel, but at least it follows a decent seduction. I'd almost given up on the hope of reading scene something as innocuous as a good look at a man's hands can raise the temperature of the room. It shouldn't come as a huge surprise then that this book was written and originally published in the early 1990's. As much as I don't miss the euphemisms, I do miss the sensual seductions that used to precede outright sex in romantic fiction.

I liked the fact that as imperfect and infuriating as both characters were, they were evenly matched. Their flaws and strengths complemented each other. Admittedly, Esmond had the advantage of his gender and the laws of the era to help him, but I also felt he was cunning enough to handle Leila when needed to, just as she was stubborn enough to demand the truth and trust he so reluctantly bestowed to anyone.

All this I liked, the story, the writing, and I liked the mystery too, which managed to surprise me to a certain extent. Also, I'm valiantly ignoring all the bad, *bad*, words like *female*, *core*, and a host of others I've managed to forget since reading the book. So, why then, isn't my rating higher?

I simply didn't like certain aspects of the book. Not only was I bored for the longest periods, I found myself baulking at how certain things were handled and how much attitudes have changed in twenty years. It has to do with the dead husband's vices and how those were described. I appreciate the historical accuracy of such attitudes, but I can't help but feel that another author writing today would have chosen his or her words differently especially when describing someone as tolerant as Comte d'Esmond talking or thinking about the matter.

Kimberly Carrington-Fox says

Nuestra reseña en *A la cama con... un libro*

Ursula says

Oh, I love this story. And Kate Reading just brought the characters to life.

Esmond/Ismael- what a guy. Complex, difficult, flawed, manipulative and desperately lonely. An exile from his beloved homeland and a man still paying for the sins of an impetuous youth. Brainwashed by an ambitious mother to believe he could be another Alexander the Great, he overreaches himself, causing havoc in the lives of many people, most importantly in the life of Leila.

Leila is also a fascinating character, a passionate artist struggling with self-loathing after she finds out her father was a criminal and a traitor. Married to a debauched and ultimately evil man, she manages to rise above this and becomes a strong, principled young woman.

And boy, do those two clash!

Their story is an interesting and angst-filled roller coaster, so that their HEA feels completely deserved. Chase writes some beautiful, emotionally charged scenes and Kate Reading makes them just perfect. The accents, the passion, the fury and despair, all of it had me captivated, if you'll pardon the pun :) Unusually, I will probably listen to this again some time, just so I can close my eyes and imagine Ismael standing there talking to me! Sigh!

Bj says

Rating is for the story. The narration by Kate Reading is 5-stars. Overall this was a decent story, with an emphasis on suspense, but a little drawn out. That said, my expectations may have been overly high given that I thought Lord of Scoundrels was one of the best HRs I've ever listened to. Unfortunately, I just didn't feel the connection between the hero and heroine here in the same way. Still a worthy listen though, especially given the fantastic narration, if you can go into it with an open mind.

Julianna says

Reviewed for www.thcreviews.com

"2.5 stars" I first read Loretta Chase's fabulous book, *Lord of Scoundrels*, over a year ago, and the book, as well as its hero and heroine, still remain among my top 10 favorites today. I discovered, after reading *Lord of Scoundrels*, that it was part of a series, and there were two books which came before it. Having loved it so much, I was quite anxious to check out those other books, but I have to say that by comparison both have greatly disappointed me. While I did see a few faint glimmers of the writing style from *Lord of Scoundrels*, neither book, and *Captives of the Night* in particular, lived up to its superior standard in my opinion. In fact there were times that I found it difficult to believe that the same author had written both books. I found *Captives of the Night* to be very heavy on the mystery element of the story to the point of overshadowing the romance, and in the end, neither aspect ever really grabbed my attention. To me, the book was very dry and lackluster, with no action to speak of at all. From my perspective, it mainly consisted of rather dull conversations, social interactions, and some character introspection. The first 2/3 of the book seemed to move at a snail's pace, and although the last 1/3 picked up a little, it was not enough to be really compelling. Overall, I'm afraid it was very much a let down for me.

As I already mentioned, neither the mystery nor the romance really struck a chord with me. In most of the mystery stories I have read, the author usually creates a line-up of potential suspects right from the start, dropping clues and hints of possible motives along the way, and making the reader think that each one may be the culprit. In *Captives of the Night*, the heroine is the first one to be suspected of her husband's murder, but of course we know that she cannot be the guilty party. As for who might be, the implication is made that nearly everyone in London hated him and may have had a motive. From there, each of the suspects were basically introduced individually, and thoroughly vetted by the hero and heroine's investigative skills to the point that I no longer took any of them seriously as the potential killer. This gave the feel of a very tedious 19th century procedural examination of a murder case that held little interest for me. It was probably very close to the reality of criminal investigation, even in the present day, but in my opinion, did not make for very compelling storytelling. I really prefer when the author of a mystery leaves a trail of breadcrumbs for me to follow, so that I can attempt to figure out the bad guy for myself. In *Captives of the Night*, each little piece of the puzzle is laid out far too neatly, giving me virtually nothing about which to speculate.

Admittedly, the real murderer was the person I least expected, so in that way I suppose it was somewhat well done. However, the reveal ended up being pretty anti-climactic. In addition, the romance aspect of the story fell completely flat for me. Except for one or two extremely brief moments, I felt no real emotion or true spark of passion between Ismal and Leila, not even any palpable sexual tension. I was simply never able to fully grasp what each of them was attracted to in the other, except that they seemed like two peas in a pod with rather similar personalities, perhaps too similar. They ended up arguing and vying for superiority almost constantly, which made their supposedly loving relationship very unbelievable to me.

I'm sure it didn't help matters, that I was not able to truly like either Ismal or Leila. Ismal had been the villain of the previous book, *The Lion's Daughter*, in which he had done some very bad things, including trying to overthrow his cousin, the leader of Albania (although he was a very distasteful character himself) and completely obsessing over the heroine of that story to the point of kidnapping and threatening to rape her. I knew that Ms. Chase was going to have to do something pretty spectacular to believably redeem Ismal in my eyes, and unfortunately, I didn't feel that she fully succeeded. She went more for the karma approach, with Ismal having repaid his "debt" both monetarily and in service to the British crown for the past ten years, but I

would have preferred some good old-fashioned remorse and groveling. As it was written, it seemed like all the characters from *The Lion's Daughter* who appeared in *Captives of the Night*, had casually forgiven him and gone their merry way almost as though nothing had ever happened. Because of my knowledge of his misdeeds in the previous book, I personally was never able to fully buy into the notion of Ismal as the hero. Regrettably, Leila wasn't much easier for me to understand. I did have a little sympathy for her over her first husband's horrendous behavior, as well as his making fun of her passionate nature. I also enjoyed the couple of brief moments when she was playing the consummate seductress, and it was nice that she had cunning sleuthing skills equal to Ismal's. Otherwise though, Leila just wasn't very relatable to me. She frequently acted like a spoiled, temperamental, and generally unpleasant woman who was given to throwing tantrums. I can certainly enjoy a good spitfire heroine, but when they behave like Leila sometimes did, they just become gratingly annoying to me. Neither Ismal nor Leila ever showed any emotional vulnerability, which in my opinion, only served to make them seem like two very cold and unfeeling individuals.

Even the secondary characters were pretty one-dimensional. The only one I was able to connect with was Avory, a young man who was acquainted with Leila's husband and had been vulnerable to his manipulations. All he really wanted was to seek the hand of his one true love, but unfortunately, that unsavory association had caused nearly everyone to mistrust him. Ultimately though, Avory played such a small role in the story, he was never able to add much depth to it. As for the other characters, I didn't really have much respect for any of them. Everyone in the book, including Ismal and Leila, appeared to be moral relativists. No one was truly good or bad, not even the wretched deceased husband. All immoral behavior was brushed off in a far too casual and accepting way, with nearly everyone making excuses for everyone else. I believe that there are often shades of gray in life, but that there are also things which are simply black and white, right and wrong. Having the entire story be nothing but shades of gray absolutely drove me to distraction. While I didn't have to completely force myself to read the entire book like I have with a few others in the past, I did have to take a few breaks to read something else for a while. I'm sure that there are other readers who would enjoy this novel far more than I did, but I personally would not recommend it for anyone except perhaps, hard-core fans of Loretta Chase.

Captives of the Night is the second book in what I have sometimes seen called the *Scoundrels* series. The first book is *The Lion's Daughter*, and the ties between it and *Captives of the Night* are pretty significant. As I mentioned earlier, Ismal was the villain of that book and played a major role in the story. There is also a secondary character, Lady Brentmor, who has a fairly important part in both books. The third book in the series is *Lord of Scoundrels*, but the ties between it and *Captives of the Night* are extremely minimal, which would explain why I was able to read *Lord of Scoundrels* without really feeling like anything was missing. Ismal aka Comte d'Esmond made a very brief appearance in *Lord of Scoundrels* at the *Vingt-Huit* pleasure palace in Paris where Dain, the hero of that book, was engaging in debauchery with his friends. These two stories essentially take place simultaneously. Although I have some serious reservations at this point, I will in all likelihood read the final book, *The Last Hellion*, at some point just for the sake of completeness.

Katie(babs) says

Loretta Chase is an incredible writer and with *Captives of the Night*, she writes a near perfect book. I recommend this to anyone who enjoys historical romance with mystery, suspense and passion from a hero for a woman who becomes his soul, or so he believes- this book is for you.

Captives is the sequel to *The Lion's Daughter* where Comte d' Esmond (Ismal is his real name) was the villain of that story and now he is the hero and after ten years he is back with a vengeance but on the right side of the law. He is undercover trying to stop a man who was even more devious than he was. Francis

Beaumont is the true villain of the piece but soon is murdered. He leaves behind a widow- Leila who is an artist and becomes the new obsession of Esmond.

Leila is an interesting woman and one that has been through so much heartache. Her husband treated her horribly, even though he saved her after the murder of her own father and allowed her talents to show through. But Francis had demons and horrible secrets that Leila comes to find out with the help of Esmond who may have been responsible for her father's death over 10 years ago. They become partners and investigate nasty dead hubby's murder and soon their passions for each other collide.

Leila and Esmond were written in such a way that was mind boggling. Chase's creative skills are top notch here and when these two characters finally come together to show their love for each other, well it is everything any romance fan would want between their hero and heroine.

This honestly is one of Chase's best works and her hero Esmond is so unique and overall seductive in his talk and actions that Leila had no chance. When she finally surrenders, she does so willingly and those scenes are beyond hot!

A definite winner and a keeper for anyone's bookshelf.

Miranda Davis says

Who wrote this dreck? Not LC. Couldn't be.

I suffered through almost all of this, the only L. Chase novel I've sincerely detested. The heroine is too embittered by her past and her opium-eating pig of a husband to allow the hero close; the preternaturally beautiful hero, a reformed evil pig himself, is enslaved by her cold aloofness and has a guilty secret about his part in ruining her life, which naturally threatens to make their love impossible.

Where are LC's flawed but likable hero and admirable heroine? Where is LC's quicksilver wit and spot-on prose?

If Leila weren't such an unrelieved bitch, I might've given a shit what happened to her and might've wondered if they eventually worked it out. But she was and I didn't. If the Comte hadn't been incomprehensibly enamored with the unpleasant bitch, I might've enjoyed the budding romance. But he was and there wasn't any. She's all surly, aloof resistance and he's all courtly, guilty devotion. Got old fast yet I got to the last 70 pp before my gag reflex kicked in. At least the pig of a husband gets his just deserts. I assume they sorted things out, but I will never find out. Just don't care.

Myself says

2/5

Pues anda que no me está costando llegar al que quiero que es "Abandonada a tus caricias"

Mira que me gustaba Esmond pero el libro no me ha logrado enganchar nada y es que la trama es de un

aburrimiento tremendo. Vamos, que estaba deseando terminarlo.

Si lo se voy directamente al libro 3

Shabby Girl ~ aka Lady Victoria says

Mmm, I'm absolutely stumped. I do not know if I even liked this book. There's a first. I'm not sure if I liked the heroine. I think I liked the hero. The mystery was good, that's for sure. I'm pretty sure I'm not as smart as I think I am because I did actually have trouble keeping up with the twists and turns of it. Interesting book.

Caz says

I've given this an A+ for narration and A- for content at AudioGals.

For those of us who are fans of historical romance audios, Loretta Chase's name has long been at the top of the list of "authors whose books we'd like to see in audio format". In 2014, our long wait was amply rewarded, with Ms Chase's **Dressmaker** books, the ever popular Lord of Scoundrels and a handful of her earlier Regencies all coming to audio. We also got a couple of early Christmas presents in the form of **The Lion's Daughter** and **Captives of the Night**, both of those narrated by the always excellent Kate Reading, whose wonderful recording of **Lord of Scoundrels** has quickly become one of my all-time favourite audiobooks.

Captives of the Night is the sequel to **The Lion's Daughter**, and in it, Ms Chase skilfully and memorably redeems the villain of the earlier book and turns him into a sexy, enigmatic and supremely capable hero – and a villain-turned-hero is like catnip for yours truly!

You can read the rest of this review at AudioGals.

Wendy says

I absolutely LOVED the audio version of **CAPTIVES OF THE NIGHT**, narrated by the highly talented Kate Reading...IMO the female version of Nicholas Boulton in terms of voice acting, versatility and consummate skill in portraying both male and female characters alike. Listening to her is pure entertainment and sheer enjoyment and delight, what more can we ask for?

I wish I had not listened out of sequence as I would have loved to have known the Comte d'Esmond/Ismal Delvina as the villain of **THE LION'S DAUGHTER**, before he becomes the hero of this novel, and he certainly redeems himself. Of course his previous, youthful, misdemeanours and crimes become known as his love for Leila Beaumont develops, and he is utterly delicious....who doesn't like to see the bad boy come good? So intent was I after the rave reviews of **LORD OF SCOUNDRELS**, which I read and then listened to with the fab Kate Reading in the driving seat, that I wanted more, and didn't check it out properly, seeing only the two names who had sparked my interest. In that novel/audio, Leila Beaumont and her dissolute husband Francis Beaumont fascinated me, also it was apparent in that story too, that Esmond was intrigued by the beautiful, aloof, and highly talented artist Leila. And also that there would be a story for them waiting to be told. I was only a little disappointed that Dain and Jessica did not make an appearance.

After the death of her husband under suspicious circumstances, Leila becomes an amateur sleuth with Esmond as her partner. He has atoned for his past crimes and has worked under cover for the past ten years, for the British Government, Leila insists on being kept informed, and indeed on being proactive in the search for her husband's killer, not for any love of him, more because she simply wants to know who perpetrated the crime and also of course, because there is a killer on the loose, and who knows who will be next? Esmond is reluctantly coerced into aiding her in her quest, the Government would far rather leave the outcome of the inquest into Beaumont's death as accidental, he was after all, a waste of space, a drink and drug addict and a sexual deviant, but Leila is intent on her course. And so the two are thrown together frequently, and the inevitable, extremely sensual, slowly simmering attraction between the two develops, and the air positively crackles. Kate Reading's portrayal of the hot headed Leila is genius, there is no doubt of Leila's artistic temperament which fairly sizzles, flying objects, temper tantrums her haphazard, loosely piled hair, falling out of its topknot, conjures up the beautiful, temperamental artist. Esmond as the impossibly handsome and enigmatic French Comte is a husky voiced...come to my bed....delight! When he finally confesses his Albanian roots and past and becomes, to Leila, at least in private, Ismal...phew! Kate Reading subtly changes the accent but not the voice, very impressive.

The plot is intricate and clever, the uncovering of it interesting and ingenious. All the strands are eventually pulled together and it becomes apparent that Leila and Ismal/Esmond are inextricably linked and have been, almost fatally, without either realising it for many years. This is romance and mystery in equal parts and I absolutely loved it. Loretta Chase and Kate Reading are to my mind as much of a dream team as Laura Kinsale and Nicholas Boulton. I will certainly not hesitate in downloading anything this talented pair have collaborated on. An absolute 5 star audio listen.

Lynn Spencer says

4.5 stars This one sagged a little in the middle for me, but I still enjoyed it quite a bit. The hero and heroine are both interesting and somewhat unusual characters. Leila Beaumont's art and her husband's wild living brought them into contact with aristocratic society, but she is not titled herself. The Comte d'Esmond may claim a title, but with non-English background and shadowy past, he's not much like the usual dukes frequenting modern European historicals either.

I found Leila and Esmond both intelligent and entertaining to watch together as they fall in love while working their way through a rather intricate mystery. As I mentioned, the middle sags a bit, but the book still works far more than it doesn't. And it's Loretta Chase, so the writing is more evocative than many. Since Esmond played the role of villain in one of Chase's previous books, I did find it interesting to see him cast as a hero 10 years later. For me, it worked. He's honorable, but also just dangerous enough that I could believe in a villainous past (or at least one full of seriously bad judgment.)

KatieV says

Hard to rate. This was well written, but didn't work so well as a romance for me. Also the timeline is a bit confusing. I read books 2-3 first and the heroine's nasty dead husband was alive and causing trouble. The book seemed to mostly take place shortly after the end of book 4.

A lot of this was like a 19th century procedural detective story. If that's your thing, you may find this more interesting. Overall, I didn't much feel the romance.

It is hard to take a villain from a prior book and make him the hero. I like it when done well. I do think Ismal was redeemable and considering his shenanigans in book 1, Chase had her work cut out for her. It's not that I think she did a bad job with it, I just missed the wit and charm that made books 3&4 so enjoyable. The only glimmer of that here was the appearance of Esme's cantankerous old grandmother, Lady Edenmont, from book 1. I do get a kick out of her.

Re: the audio, Kate Reading was excellent as always.

Anachronist says

Why I read this?

Why I have to explain myself? Well, ok, I just feel like explaining... Every time I read a romance book I think I need to explain...oh well...maybe because a romance, historical, paranormal or contemporary, is not exactly my favourite genre. I read this novel only because it was recommended to me - otherwise I wouldn't touch it for sure. Apparently this is part 2 in the 4 book series. Here are the titles of other parts: The Lion's Daughter (01, out of print), Lord of Scoundrels (03), The Last Hellion (04). Here you go. Let's get back to the review.

Synopsis:

After a visit of three strangers in their nice Venice apartment 17-year old Leila Bridgeburton finds herself all of a sudden a penniless orphan as the body of her dear papa is floating in one of the canals. She is just one step away from being thrown out on the streets and facing a very bleak future. Fortunately a prince charming in the person of a young, handsome Francis Beaumont rescues her. Instantly smitten with his young charge, he seduces Leila first and then, very chivalrously, marries her (my hero!). They move to Paris where Leila studies painting and leads a relatively comfortable life. End of the story? Nah. Just a beginning.

About six years later Francis's hedonistic lifestyle and complete lack of common sense have aged him significantly, weakening his body and garnering him legions of enemies, his wife among them. Leila, now a talented portrait painter, finds herself utterly disgusted with her savior. Francis's primary function is to act as a buffer against the many men interested in pursuing her but Leila becomes more and more outraged when her husband openly entertains whores in their house and takes drugs. They quarrel a lot. Of course he claims that, somehow, it is still her fault. However, when he turns up so conveniently dead in their London house, it's Leila who has to face murder charges. The investigation is led by Comte d'Esmond, a man of many talents who not only moves easily within the highest levels of society but has also spent the past ten years as one of the government's most trusted and discreet covert operatives. Because of his skillful maneuvering she is acquitted but she must help a quiet investigation, initiated by government officials. They fear the fallout from Francis's numerous blackmail and extortion schemes which were financing his bad habits - they could do irreversible damage to the ranks of careless statesmen and aristocrats alike.

The investigation promises to be lengthy and tedious. Neither Leila nor Esmond are particularly happy about his involvement in the case, as their relationship, since he orchestrated a meeting in Paris the year before, has been a tug-of-war between attraction and resistance. Esmond is a man with a dark and treacherous past, Leila

has been gravely disappointed by her late husband. However, she knows she must find the culprit and clear her name if she wants to pursue her artistic career. Not to mention the fact that the murderer might be after her as well. Will they find who murdered Francis and for what reasons? What else will they discover during that process?

What I liked:

This book was 70% mystery and 30% romance – that's why I think I appreciated it more than an average romantic novel. We get here a mysterious death puzzle with plenty of viable and interesting suspects and secondary characters, two fascinating protagonists, a complex interrelationship and an escalating emotional and sexual tension (yes, in this exact order, not the other way round). I found it very well executed, not unlike plots in books of my favourite romance writer, Courtney Milan.

When it comes to the seduction – it was really realistic. The whole situation could be described shortly this way: "the husband lusts after d'Esmond, who's after the wife, who only wants to be left alone to paint but somehow couldn't get d'Esmond out of her head for a reason or two". A romantic triangle? Hardly. Most of it takes part after the demise of dear Francis and very rightly so, that man was up to no good.

Now some more about the mystery, revolving around Francis' killer, and the main characters, trying to solve the said mystery.

The criminal puzzle, which takes up much more space than the romantic thread, is clever. Francis, a great baddie, was a real deviant who loved blackmailing people and made them dance to his own tune. He had so many enemies you are rather spoiled for choice. Reading about his exploits and strategies you start to admire his wife. You see, Leila is one of these heroines who develop before the eyes of the reader. Soon she becomes so much stronger and savvy that the frightened, drugged young girl, introduced at the very beginning. She is nicely rounded, has a depth and passion. She did love her husband at first but she couldn't save him from his own demons. What's more, she is so clearly Esmond's match, both of body and mind, that their inevitability as a couple with a satisfying HEA stretching out before them, became a given for me from almost the start. Both of them have scars and wounds to heal. Neither character wallows in their misfortune. The Comte is decidedly not as serene as he appears on the surface. Leila Beaumont has been emotionally damaged by her husband and can't trust men at all – as soon as she realizes how many secrets the Comte is keeping she knows she can't trust him either. And yet they have to work together and she slowly begins to unpick his story and find out more about him, much against his will.

I was rather afraid, reading about the Big Misunderstanding that was trailed from about a third of the book, a bit silly plot device which is very often used and abused in such novels. Fortunately the author did something rather better with this than you would usually expect in this kind of fictional narration.

What I didn't like:

First let me tell you that I am simply puzzled by the cover art, presented above. We see a man with a very modern haircut peeping through some bed hangings or curtains; he's got a definite five o'clock shadow and completely hairless arms (waxed? shaved? both?). He certainly doesn't look like an Albanian masquerading as a French Count in 1829, who is described as having slightly overlong blonde hair and amazingly sapphire blue eyes. He also doesn't look like Francis Beaumont – his face is far too young and too fresh, without any those tell-tale symptoms of drug abuse. I really don't understand who he is and what he is doing here - it seems as if the book got a cover from another story.

Speaking about Albanians - I didn't read the first part of this series so I might not know all the facts but it simply galled me that the omniscient narrator several times referred to Count d'Esmond as a 'barbarian' or wrote about his 'barbarian half'. It seems she did so to emphasize the fact that the man came from a very wild and exotic country, apparently full of man-eaters, dragons, vampires and such. I found it rather unjust. If it was said by other characters I would understand - at that time British people treated everything non-British as simply 'barbarian'. However, it was stated by that wretched omniscient narrator...and she should have known better. For example Francis was never called a barbarian because he was a British citizen who lived many years in Paris. It didn't matter that he was clearly a sadist and a drug fiend, it didn't matter that he loved to blackmail his victims and was not above exploiting them psychologically and sexually...but he was not a barbarian, he was British...hm...mm...

Final verdict:

This one really exceeded my expectations in a very positive way. I caught myself several times thinking 'it is really good! how come it is so good?' If you feel like reading a romance novel I highly recommend this one. You can always make a nice dust jacket out of a newspaper sheet and hide that stupid man on the cover.
