



DEIRDRE AND DON JUAN

JO BEVERLEY

ROUGE
REGENCY

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About the Book

Ever since his wife left him, The Earl of Everdon – known by those around him as ‘Don Juan’ – has led a life of illicit liaisons and scandal. Until his rakish reputation threatens to be his downfall.

He sets his sights on Lady Deirdre Stowe, a quiet young girl from the village. Only, she is already betrothed... Will she let him win her heart?

***Deirdre and Don Juan* is a hot romance novel and RITA award-winner perfect for fans for Georgette Heyer.**

About the Author

Jo Beverley writes bestselling historical romance novels. Publishers Weekly declared her “Arguably today’s most skillful writer of intelligent historical romance...” Her work has been described as “Sublime!” by *Booklist*, and *Romantic Times* declared her to be “one of the great names of the genre.”

She was born and raised in England and has a degree in history and American Studies from Keele University. She emigrated to Canada in 1976. In 2008 she returned to England and now lives in Devon. Her novels are set in the medieval, Georgian, and Regency periods and have won five RITAs, romance’s top award, as well as many other accolades. She is one of twelve members of the Romance Writers of America’s Hall of Fame.

Also by Jo Beverley:

Seduction in Silk
A Scandalous Countess
Lord Wraybourne's Betrothed
The Stanforth Secrets
The Stolen Bride
Emily and the Dark Angel
The Fortune Hunter

DEIRDRE AND DON JUAN

Jo Beverley



Dear Reader,

Welcome to *Lovers and Ladies*, which brings back into print two of my favorite novels, *The Fortune Hunter* and *Deirdre and Don Juan*.

Both are traditional Regencies that have long been out of print, and I know many of you are as glad to see them available again as I am. And for those of you to whom they are new, I hope you will enjoy discovering them!

I have always loved writing fiction set in the English Regency (which is the period from 1811 to 1820, when the Prince of Wales was regent for his father, the mad King George III). It's a short, complex, and rich period that's become familiar as the setting for Jane Austen's classic and wonderful romance novels.

The period has style in its long Georgian windows letting in light to shine on bright woodwork and the delicate furniture of Sheraton and Heppelwhite. We all know of the high-waisted Empire dresses and the new, darker elegance of gentlemen's evening wear. Roads had improved, so people could travel the country and even visit the stately homes of the rich. Cities were increasingly lit by gas lighting.

However, the Regency could also be wild and wicked. In three of Jane Austen's Bennet sisters, we see the dimensions of their time: Jane Bennet is modest and well-behaved; Elizabeth Bennet is passionate and rebellious; and Lydia Bennet is wild and wicked.

My Regency fiction follows suit. Some novels are modest and discreet, some passionate and rebellious, and yes, some are wild and wicked. But as with the Bennet girls, there's always a happy ending.

The modest and discreet style of Regency romance is usually called the "traditional Regency." *The Fortune*

Hunter and *Deirdre and Don Juan* are examples of this.

In a traditional romance, the stories stick closely to the social mores of the early nineteenth century. Certainly the aristocracy was wilder than the gentry, but even in the haut ton, there were rules, and consequences of breaking them, which make for interesting stories.

The Fortune Hunter and *Deirdre and Don Juan* have always been particular favorites of mine, because they explore the idea of beauty from opposite angles. In my books, extreme beauty is more likely to be a challenge than a gift, which is true to life, I believe.

In *The Fortune Hunter*, Amy de Lacy is a raving beauty, but all it brings her is the burden of being the one who has to try to snare a rich husband to support her brothers and sisters. In our times they could all have gone out and found jobs, but the options for Regency gentry were more limited; without money, their future is grim. In the end, of course, it's not beauty that matters.

In *Deirdre and Don Juan*, we have a young woman who lacks beauty. It was important to me that Deirdre not be an ugly duckling—a plain woman who would turn into a beauty with a minor makeover. Certainly her clothes are unfortunate, but she is what she is. When Everdon comes to value, desire, and love her, it is for Deirdre, the whole person, not for parts of her or despite her appearance.

And he fights to win her, as does Amy's Harry, passing a crucial test of love.

If you've enjoyed these stories, I have written many other romances set in the Regency period, some of these in the traditional style and others of the more dramatic type. The most recent is *Lady Beware*, which was published in June 2007. A new novel set a couple of generations earlier, *A Lady's Secret*, is on shelves now. You can find a complete list of my books, including free samples, at www.jobev.com.

You'll find lots of additional material there, including background details and pictures relevant to the novels.

Come for a visit and enjoy. You can also sign up for my e-mail newsletter, which means you'll receive the latest news about my books and promotional activities. You can contact me at jo@jobev.com.

If you don't have access to a computer, you can write through my agent. Address a letter to me c/o The Rotrosen Agency, 318 East 51st Street, New York, NY 10022. I appreciate an SASE if you would like a reply.

A good book is such a treasure. May you have many in your life.

All best wishes,
Jo Beverley

1

THE NEWS OF his wife's death caught the Earl of Everdon in his mistress's bed. He knew most of the world would consider this unremarkable for a man generally known as Don Juan, but he could only see it as a social solecism. Even as he read the disturbing letter, he directed a few choice epithets toward his thick-skulled secretary. What had possessed young Morrow to send it here?

After all, he'd not clapped eyes on his wife for close to ten years, so this travel-stained record of Genie's demise could surely have waited until he returned home.

Noblesse obliged, however, and he detached himself from Barbara Vayne's demanding fingers, swung out of bed, and began to pull on his clothes.

He was a tall, handsome man of thirty, who had inherited a distinctly Latin cast to his features from his Spanish mother. His skin had a yearlong darkness unusual in England; his eyes were a deep velvet brown under smooth, heavy lids; his brows and lashes were richly dark. His hair, however, had been touched by his English heritage, and showed sherry gold lights in the afternoon sun. This merely served to emphasize the darker cast of his skin.

"Don, what's the matter?" his abandoned lover demanded plaintively, pouting her lush lips.

He fastened his pantaloons. "A family crisis."

Barbara threw off the covers and arched. "Something more important than this?"

He tried never to be unkind to a woman, so he paid her the homage of a hot, regretful look, but didn't halt his dressing. His mind was on other things.

There were disturbing aspects to this situation.

Ten years of freedom were over.

He had married Iphegenia Brandon when only twenty, and just down from Cambridge. In retrospect, it had not been wise, and the subsequent disasters had been excruciatingly embarrassing, but he had grown accustomed. In time, he had even discovered that there were advantages to being an abandoned husband.

For the past ten years the Matchmaking Mamas had regretfully ignored him. He had been able to behave with remarkable rashness without any possibility of being forced to the altar. His only brother's death the year before had caused him to investigate the possibility of divorce, but he had intended to select a bride with great care well before he was known to be available.

Now, however, he was fair prey in the matrimonial hunt. Absurd though it was, once this news broke, even someone like Barbara—the wanton widow of a highly disreputable infantry captain—might think she had a chance of getting Lord Everdon to the altar.

He didn't neglect the courtesy of a heated farewell kiss, but he first imprisoned Barbara's hands above her head, just to be sure he escaped her bedroom safely.

Then Mark Juan Carlos Renfrew, Earl of Everdon and lord of a score of minor properties, walked through the streets of Mayfair feeling vulnerable for the first time in his adult life.

During the walk his wariness turned to irritation, and the irritation found a focus. When he arrived at his Marlborough Square mansion, he stalked into his secretary's study and tossed the letter on David Morrow's desk. "Preaching, I'll abide, but not outright malice. You are dismissed."

The young man was already on his feet. Now he wavered, sheet white. "I'm *what ...?*"

“You heard me. I will give you an adequate reference as to the conscientiousness of your work.”

“But ... but *why*, my lord?”

Everdon was arrested. Young Morrow was nothing if not honest, and his bewilderment rang true. “Why did you send that letter over to Barbara’s house?”

“But ... but your wife, my lord. She’s *dead*!”

“Six months ago, according to that Greek priest.”

“But even so ... you would want to know ... You wouldn’t want, at such a moment ...” The young man flushed red with embarrassment.

Everdon swore with exasperation. “David, my beloved Genie ran off with an Italian diplomat nearly ten years ago, within six months of our ill-judged and juvenile marriage. She has since worked her way through the best—or worst—part of the European nobility. Why the devil should I care that she’s finally met her end?”

But Everdon did care, and knew his untypical foul mood was a direct consequence of that distant death.

Young Morrow’s lips quivered slightly, but he stiffened his spine. “I am sorry for so misjudging the situation, my lord. I will just collect my possessions—”

“Stubble it,” said Everdon curtly, fairness reasserting itself. As the fourth son of an impoverished family, David Morrow had his way to make in the world, and he was an excellent employee. It wasn’t the lad’s fault that he was as prissy as a cloistered nun. It amused Everdon to surround himself with righteousness.

“I apologize for misjudging you.” Everdon smiled, deliberately using his charm to soothe. “Sit down and get on with your work, David. But if you’re researching that matter of the relief of debtors for me, remember my interest as always is pragmatic, not moral or sanctimonious. Give me facts and figures, not sermons.”

The secretary sat with a thump, relief flooding his round face. “Thank you, my lord. Of course, my lord ...”

Everdon waved away gratitude. "As you see, I am decidedly out of curl."

"Er ... because of your wife, my lord?"

Everdon's smile became twisted. "You could put it that way. I'm out of curl because I'm going to have to choose my next wife in a devil of a hurry."

Upon leaving his secretary, Everdon went straight to his mother's suite.

Lucetta, Dowager Countess of Everdon, was a handsome woman whose strong-boned face clearly showed her Spanish heritage. Though she was fifty, her black hair held no touch of gray, and her fine dark eyes could still flash with emotion. She was, however, afflicted with a hip disease that made even walking painful, and she largely kept to her rooms, receiving guests and engaging in her passion—embroidery. Everdon kissed her cheek, then surveyed her latest piece, an exquisite working of purple pansies on gossamer silk.

"That is very beautiful, Mother, but I can hardly see it as a chairback." He spoke Spanish, as he always did when alone with his mother.

She chuckled. "Assuredly not, my dear. In truth, I am not sure what I shall do with it. Lady Deirdre has infected me with this notion of needlework for its own sake. I suppose if nothing else occurs, it will make a panel for a gown."

He shook his head. "The lady does not exist who is worthy of such ornamentation."

"What nonsense you speak, Marco. It is just embroidery. Poor women do work as fine for pennies to ornament our society blossoms."

"I disagree." He studied the work in her frame. "That is a special piece. It's the difference between a portrait by Lawrence, and one by an itinerant artist. Lady Deirdre has a case to make. When it is finished, I shall have that work framed."

Lucetta studied her son, her only child now his younger brother was dead, killed at Vittoria. She sensed an unusual uneasiness in him. "What brings you here today, Marco?"

He glanced up, and his long-lashed dark eyes reminded her poignantly of her brother at the same age, and in a scrape. She knew she really shouldn't blame Marco for his philandering when he had inherited her family's devastating charms, but she did. Or at least, she worried.

He evaded her question. "Do I need an excuse to visit you, *Madrecita*?"

"Of course not, but it is rare to see you in the afternoon. There are so many competing attractions."

A faint color rose in his cheeks. Beneath the olive skin many would not have noticed it, but she was accustomed to reading such things. "Well?" she demanded.

He looked down at a glossy boot. "Genie's dead."

Lucetta's needle paused for a moment. "At last," she said. "Mother!"

She continued setting stitches. "Am I supposed to feign grief? I am not sorry. I am not surprised. I can even guess the cause of her death."

"Mother, really ..."

"You English are so mealymouthed. She was a wretched young woman, and doubtless died miserably of the pox. Her suffering may save her immortal soul."

"Hardly the sentiment of a good English Protestant," he pointed out.

"I became a Protestant for your father. I reverted to the true faith when he died, as you know." She fixed him with a direct look. "This is good. Now you can marry again."

"That is my duty," he said bleakly.

Lucetta's face softened. "Not all women are as Iphegenia was, dearest one. And you are much wiser now." She sighed. "I have blamed myself most deeply."

He moved restlessly to a window overlooking the extensive gardens of his mansion. "It wasn't your fault,

love. I was mad for her."

"But you were young, Marco. Not yet twenty. It was my duty as your mother to be wise for you."

Lucetta abandoned her work before she made a botch of it. It was time for truth. "I saw your grandfather and uncles in you, you see. Women came to them so easily, they could not resist. It caused great problems. Genie was so beautiful, so passionate. When you loved her, I thought she might satisfy you and keep you safe."

He turned to face her. "And instead, I failed to satisfy her."

"No man could satisfy her. She proved that over and again."

He said nothing—he never had on this subject—but she read old anguish in his face. "Do you still feel tenderly toward her, Marco?"

He turned again, hiding from her. "Feel for her? I can hardly remember her. I remember how I felt ..." His voice turned brisk. "Never fear. I know I must marry. With Richard gone, and Cousin Ian ailing, I have no choice. I can hardly leave the earldom to Kevin, fond though I am of him. I must get an heir. It is merely a matter of finding the right woman."

"That should not be difficult. You will be the prize of the Marriage Mart." Lucetta saw him wince and struggled to keep a straight face. As she took up her needle again, she thought that the next weeks could be amusing. She was determined, however, that this time her son would make a good marriage. He probably wouldn't believe it, but he was capable of making the right woman a wonderful husband.

"I suppose I shall have to see what is still available this late in the Season," he said. "At least I'm not looking for a Belle or an heiress. Just someone quiet, plain, and content to stay at home."

Lucetta's needle froze. "Quiet? Plain? That is hardly to your taste."

"It is in wives," he said crisply. "I am hoping you have a candidate in mind."

"I will have nothing to do with such foolishness," she stated. "You will join the social whirl and find someone who appeals to you."

"I am recently bereaved," he said piously.

His mother spat a Spanish opinion of that excuse. "Six months bereaved."

Everdon leaned against a wall, arms folded. "Very well, the truth. It's too dangerous out there. I intend to be in control of this selection."

"Foolish boy. Are you afraid of the Matchmaking Mamas?"

His grin was disarming. "Terrified. I've worn the armor of my marriage for so long, I feel naked without it." He put on a most beguiling smile. "If you love me, *mama mia*, you will find me a safe candidate. You can't persuade me you don't know every one of this year's crop."

Lucetta placed a careful stitch. "Maud Tiverton, then."

"Maud Tiverton! She looks like a cross between Torquemada and a pug."

Lucetta smiled sweetly at him. "At least you could be sure no man would steal her from under your nose."

This time anyone would have seen the color in his cheeks. He made no defense or denial.

"Oh, my dear," said Lucetta seriously. "This is no way to choose your companion in life. Give it time."

He shook his head. "Life can be chancy—look at Richard and Ian. I know my duty." He twisted his gold signet ring. "Since Ian fell sick and recovery became unlikely, I'd even made moves to obtain a divorce, though I hate the thought of a public airing of Genie's behavior. I know the distress it would cause her parents ..."

"At least that is no longer necessary," said Lucetta gently.

"True. And I'd be a fool to waste the last weeks of the Season. What better time to find a bride? If you won't help,

I will just have to pick one blindfolded." He shrugged.
"Marriage is a mere lottery anyway. If one doesn't spend too long anguishing over the ticket, there's less pain if it turns out a loser."

Lucetta rested her hands on her frame and considered him with a frown. She could tell he was in earnest and would do this foolish thing. "Very well, then. If that is how it is, I think you should marry Deirdre."

"Deirdre Stowe?" he said blankly.

"Lady Deirdre Stowe, daughter of the Earl of Harby. My young friend, whom you have met here now and again. That Deirdre."

"Why?"

"Why not?" she asked briskly. "Is not one lottery ticket as good as another? She is wellborn and well-bred. Her portion is comfortable. She is composed, but not weak. She will be well able to run your households and raise your children. It does, however, seem highly unlikely that some man will try to filch her from you—men being shortsighted in these matters—and even less likely that she would dream of being filched. Furthermore," she added tartly, "I have more concern for my comfort than you have for yours, and I like her."

He shrugged. "The best argument of all. Consider it done."

Her eyes flashed angrily. "Does it not occur to you, you wretch, that she might refuse you?"

He quirked a brow. "No. Will she?"

She glared at him but then sighed and shook her head. "It is unlikely, I fear. It would do you good to be refused for once. One reason I suggested Deirdre—and I am beginning to regret it—is that she is having a miserable time. She doesn't speak of it, but I am sure she is a wallflower."

"Men probably just don't notice her," Everdon pointed out. "She's so thin and wishy-washy, I hardly notice her

when she's here in the room." He looked around, in the pretense that the young lady might in fact be present.

Lucetta shook her head. "It will not do, will it? I will try to think of someone more suitable."

"Nonsense. She is ideal. I believe the Ashbys are holding a soirée tonight. Will she be there?"

"It is likely. Her mother drags her everywhere, firmly convinced that one day a miracle will happen, and Deirdre will turn into a Toast before everyone's eyes."

He grinned. "And so she will. She is about to sweep Don Juan off his feet."

Lucetta focused on him the full force of a maternal look. "Marco, I warn you: hurt Deirdre and you will pray for the fires of hell."

That evening Lord Everdon commanded his valet to produce his dark evening clothes and kid slippers, a sure sign that he was intent on Polite Society and not debauchery. Joseph Bing's conscience could for once be at ease as he used his considerable skills to turn his employer out to perfection.

Joseph's conscience had frequently been troubled since he had been saved and become a follower of John Wesley.

He told his friends at the Chapel that he only kept his post with the earl because his employer indulgently allowed him plenty of free time to attend to Chapel business, and the whole of Sunday off. The truth was that he was very fond of Everdon, whom he'd served since his Cambridge days. He found professional satisfaction in valeting such a fine figure of a man, and he hoped to save him from perdition.

The perils Joseph feared were twofold. On the one hand, the earl was clearly given over to fornication of the most blatant kind. That placed him in risk of damnation. The far greater danger, however, was that he would have a sudden

religious experience and follow his mother into the maw of papacy.

Joseph Bing was determined to prevent that fate, and to somehow wean the earl from his fondness for loose women. He could hardly hope Everdon would ever join the Wesleyan fraternity, but a virtuous lifestyle and a sober adherence to the Church of England would make Joseph a very happy man.

As Joseph finished shaving his master's smooth, brown skin, the earl said, "Has the news somehow escaped, Joseph? I am a widower. You may felicitate me."

Joseph gave thanks he had put down the razor before that disconcerting announcement. "Congratulations, my lord," he said, though it hardly seemed proper. He remembered sadly the beautiful, willful Iphegenia, and the brief fury of youthful passion that had been that ill-fated marriage. In the aftermath he had feared for the young earl's sanity. It was a miracle really that it had merely turned him to vice ...

"You needn't sound so squeamish," said Everdon as he stood and shrugged off the cloth that protected his shirt. "Genie died six months ago." He deftly tied a cravat, then allowed Joseph to ease on his brocade waistcoat and plain, elegant jacket. "I merely forewarn you of possible changes. I intend to marry again."

"That is good news, milord," said Joseph as he smoothed the cloth over broad shoulders. His joy was honest. That's what the earl needed—the love of a good woman.

But would he choose one?

"I'm glad you think so. Time will tell." Everdon surveyed himself in the mirror. "The pearl, I think." When the valet brought the pearl pin, Everdon said, "And how are matters at the Chapel?"

Joseph had thought at one time that his master mocked him when he said such things, but it appeared not to be the

case. "Very well, thank you, milord. Your support for our school is much appreciated."

Everdon deftly adjusted his cravat and fixed the pin. "Have you ever thought of providing a refuge for unfortunate women?"

Joseph glanced at his employer. What lay behind this? He cleared his throat. "You would perhaps mean streetwalkers, my lord?"

"And others too unsavory to be helped by the tight-lipped brigade. There must be many women who make unfortunate choices and come to regret them. What becomes of them?"

Joseph foresaw trouble with some of the Chapel members, but he was a true seeker after good. "I believe our Savior would want us to help such women, as He helped Mary Magdalene."

"So do I. I will be most generous in my support of such a project." Everdon swung on his cloak. "I dislike seeing any woman in distress."

It was said in his usual flippant manner, but Joseph detected some deeper meaning behind it. Did Lord Everdon have a particular woman in mind? Well, if housing one of the earl's old loves was the price of helping hundreds, it was a small price to pay.

Everdon took his hat and gloves from Joseph. "The news of my widowing is not to be made public just yet, Joseph. I prefer not to create a stir. To be more precise," he added with a flickering smile, "I do not want to alert the hunt. Now I go to pick a lottery ticket. Wish me luck, but don't wait up."

As Joseph tidied the room, he muttered, "The nonsense he do talk. Now, why would he want a lottery ticket, rich as he is?"

The Ashby soirée was being hosted by Lord and Lady Randal Ashby, dashing leaders of Society, in the mansion of

Lord Randal's father, the Duke of Tyne. Everdon had learned from his invitation that it was in honor of Randal's cousin, Harry Crisp, and his promised bride, Miss Amy de Lacy. He knew Harry slightly, but not the girl; he was not in the habit of attending the more formal social affairs.

The event was well under way when Everdon arrived, and he had to search out his host and hostess.

"Lord Everdon, we're honored," said Sophie Ashby, affecting satirical amazement, but she smiled warmly as he kissed her hand. They were well acquainted, for Randal did not hesitate to bring his wife to more racy entertainments.

She was a vivacious young woman with something of a gamine appearance, but a sweetly curved figure. Everdon had a taste for curves in his women. He thought of thin Deirdre Stowe, and suffered a pang of doubt.

He gave Sophie a genuinely admiring smile. "I thought I'd see how the polite world went along."

"Being more familiar with the impolite?" she queried with a twinkle of humor.

He laughed. He also admired a woman who could bandy words. "They christened me Don Juan in my school days, and my fate was sealed."

Lord Randal remarked, "I earned the nickname of the Bright Angel. I managed to outgrow it, Don."

"Did you indeed? Yet I detect a glitter still, and the touch of the wicked that was behind the name."

"How true," said Sophie with a teasing look at her handsome blond husband. Randal's response was a glance of heated yet discreet intimacy.

Everdon realized with a pang that he'd shared something similar once with Genie, who hadn't really loved him, and was dead ...

"So," Randal was asking, "why are you here, Don? I assure you, this evening ain't about to become exciting. All the ancient family connections are here, for a start."