



Jane
LARK

The
Desperate Love

of a Lord

historical



Jane Lark

The Desperate Love of a Lord: A Free Novella

Аннотация

From Kindle bestselling Historical romance author, Jane Lark, comes a brand new FREE novella to accompany her breathtakingly beautiful Regency series. Fiercely independent, Lady Violet Rimes, the merry widow, has played the ton, dangling men from leashes like a pack of adoring hounds, always the one in control. Never has a man toyed with her. An idle, attractive, rake, Lord Geoffrey Sparks has had little to do other than enjoy life. He has let Violet play her games for months without complaint: he likes her company – and admittedly her bed. But in recent months things have changed between them. He likes her for who she is and not simply the notorious widow. He thought his feelings were returned, but now she has suddenly vanished without a word... Heartbreaker or heartbroken? Don't miss the other novels in the series, *The Illicit Love of a Courtesan*, *The Passionate Love of a Rake*, *The Scandalous Love of a Duke*, *The Lost Love of a Soldier*

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The Desperate Love of a Lord
A Free Historical Romance Novella
JANE LARK



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Praise for Jane Lark

“Jane Lark has an incredible talent to draw the reader in from the first page onwards.”

Cosmochicklitan Book Reviews

“Any description that I give you would not only spoil the story but could not give this book a tenth of the justice that it deserves. Wonderful!”

Candy Coated Book Blog

“This book held me captive after the first 2 pages. If I could crawl inside and live in there with the characters I would.”

A Reading Nurse Blogspot

“The book swings from truly swoon-worthy, tense and heart wrenching, highly erotic and everything else in between.”

BestChickLit.com

“I love Ms. Lark’s style—beautifully descriptive, emotional and can I say, just plain delicious reading? This is the kind of mixer upper I’ve been looking for in romance lately.”

Devastating Reads BlogSpot

Part One

Looking from the window of the dingy hotel room, Lady Violet Rimes gathered her courage. She knew what the physician was about to say. She could not quite believe she had trapped herself in this dreadful muddle. She was a grown woman, a widow who knew the way of the world and she had always been cautious before, but this time ...

“I presume, Ma’am, you know you are with child?”

“How far gone? When is it due?” Her bleeding had stopped weeks ago, though she’d pretended it was not happening. She had spent the last weeks half hoping it was true and half wishing it were not.

“I would think February, Ma’am.”

February? It was already October.

The physician hesitated. “I know of ... If you ... There is a woman who can help with such things –”

“No.” She wanted the child. She had wanted a child by her husband. But none had come. Since then unless she’d married again, caution was the only choice. She’d avoided conception as best she could. But now fate had made her choice she was neither going to give up the child or allow it to be condemned by scandal. She would keep the child. It was her life which must change.

“No, thank you. I will manage.” She faced him, the heat of a blush creeping over her skin as she remembered how he’d

examined her alone in this room, moments before. He'd left her to straighten her clothing and then returned to share his judgement. He must have surmised she had no husband, and her voice probably labelled her as wealthy, even though she'd taken a dress from her maid's closet, to help hide the fact.

This whole thing made her feel sordid and guilty. She'd been hiding her condition from the world for weeks and now she was hiding herself.

Violet's heart raced as she looked at the doctor as though he could provide an alternative answer, but she must find her own answer. She felt cold inside, in her stomach and in her limbs, but yet her heart was warm, with longing. *I am with child.*

Her heartbeat pounded in her ears. How could she be a mother? "Thank you, Dr Rivers, but, no," she said with more control, "I do not wish for any help, not in that way. I will have the child. Is it healthy?"

"Everything seems well –"

"Thank you," she said again, picking up her reticule.

After she'd paid him, he left.

Her fingers shook as she tied the ribbons of her bonnet. Oh how ridiculous. She was known for her confidence. Her gaze spun about the inn room she'd hired. She had thought it better to see the physician on neutral ground, so no one could see her enter his offices, nor see him enter her home. But it only made the whole thing seem sordid, but why should she feel ashamed. She was glad, warmth seeped from her heart into her limbs as an

ache stretching from her middle into her breast.

I am with child.

As she left the room, closing the door behind her, she thought of her friend Jane, and longed for her company. Jane had only recently left London, and yesterday Violet had seen an announcement in the paper advising Jane had married again. She'd married the man who had been chasing her all summer. Violet imagined Jane happy. But the picture of Jane's happiness only made envy twist like the pain of a cruel dagger in Violet's stomach. She'd never expected to marry again. But what would she do now?

Go away. She had to. She was already showing. Options spun in a whorl in her head. She must leave London. Go somewhere no one knew her and not come back. She must live there and begin a new life.

Geoff. His hazel eyes, glittering at her with laughter, appeared in her mind's eye. At least he had not noticed how rotund her figure had become. He should have noticed. She had noticed. But perhaps he had not dared to comment.

She stepped from the bottom step of the stairs within the inn, and deliberately did not look left or right, fearing she might see someone she knew. Instead she crossed the entrance hall in a hurry and went out into the street. It was very wrong to be walking alone without a maid, but then she was dressed as a servant, and the poke bonnet hid her face.

Her heart cried out for the man who usually walked with her.

Geoff.

She was going to miss him. She loved him. A tight knot tied in her stomach, and a clenching feeling gripped about her heart.

She hurried along the street, unsure whether it was best to merely walk home or try and stop a hackney carriage. Which would encourage more outrage if she was seen entering her house? She would walk, she needed the exercise to absorb her restless thoughts, and perhaps by the time she reached home, some inspiration would have come and she'd know what on earth to do.

When she crossed the street, Geoff's smile came to mind. She missed the solidity of his arm to grip.

Male company, within a bed and without, had been her obsession for the last few years. She'd slept with numerous men since her husband had passed. So many she'd lost count. But Lord Geoffrey Sparks had become far more than pleasure. He was necessity. Yet she had to leave him behind now. For their child's sake. He would not wish a woman like her as his wife. He was a third son and she was seven years his senior, though he thought her only three. What they'd had, had been merely entertainment to him too. She knew how offspring of liaisons like theirs were managed. He would expect her to hand the child to some poor woman to foster. Well, Violet would have none of that. He would not even know of the child.

If only she had not been fool enough to fall in love.

~

Lord Geoffrey Sparks dropped the door knocker thrice more. It hit the brass plaque with a heavy ring.

Bloody hell. Why was her butler not answering?

“Violet!” he shouted through the door, hoping no one else in the street was awake. *Damnation.* Why was she shutting him out all of a sudden? He had not seen her for three nights, and he’d done the rounds of every damned venue.

She had not been out.

He’d called one afternoon too, to be told she was not at home.

He rapped the knocker again.

It might be two in the morning but he was not going until he’d spoken to her. “Violet!”

He’d sent her four messages and received no reply.

Why the hell had she gone cold on him? They’d been thick for weeks. He’d slept here most nights for the last four.

He hammered the knocker once more. “Violet!”

He’d probably had too much to drink, but it was the brandy which had given him the courage to come and make a spectacle of himself. He felt like such a bloody fool, falling for her so heavily if she had just been playing games.

But he hadn’t thought she was playing games. They’d grown comfortable. He’d thought a true companionship had developed between them. She’d trusted him more and more in the last weeks, leaning on him for support when her closest friend had gone missing a couple of weeks ago.

For Heaven’s sake, she had accused Barrington, whom her

friend, Jane, had just married, of being a threat to Jane, of potentially breaking her heart, and now Violet was breaking *his*.

Why would she suddenly throw him off like this? Was there someone else?

In the past he knew she'd flitted between men. He'd shared a few casual liaisons with her over the year before they'd stepped into the new territory of a proper affair.

He'd been one of many then, and it hadn't bothered him, but once he'd got to know her better, he'd wanted to keep her for himself. They'd spent hours and hours together over the summer and he'd swear she'd been with no one else.

So why now? Why had it changed?

"Selford! Violet! I am not going away, so open the bloody door!" He thrust the knocker against the wood again, yelling to her butler.

Finally, he heard movement inside, and a moment later there was the scrape of bolts and locks shifting.

He held his breath, his right hand slipping from the knocker and closing into a fist.

What would he say when he saw her? What would he do? Cry? Plead? Is that what this woman had brought him to?

God, Barrington would laugh his head off when he learned of this. While Barrington had found happiness, Geoff had been discarded.

It was pitiful.

He gritted his teeth as the door opened and then he faced

Selford, who held the door open only a few inches and looked through the gap. “Lady Rimes is not at home, sir”

Was she not, or was she in bed with someone?

Geoff pushed the door wider and forced the man back as he stepped in.

Shock petrified Selford’s face for a moment as he lifted a hand to warn Geoffrey back. “My Lord.”

“Is she upstairs?” The hall span a little, Geoffrey had definitely had too much to drink.

“No, sir, Lady Rimes has left town.”

“Left town, do you think me a fool, Selford? The knocker is still in place!” He thrust his arm out to indicate the open door behind him. It would have been removed if she’d left.

“Because Lady Rimes wished it so, sir, she wished no one to note her absence.”

A frown furrowed Geoff’s brow. That did not make sense.

He moved then, walking past Selford, convinced she was hiding upstairs.

Perhaps she *was* with another man.

Geoff raced upstairs as the butler called him back, and then ran along the hall, taking-in nothing but the fact he had to find her.

He burst into her rooms, thrusting the door aside. The curtains were open, he’d been so angry he hadn’t even noticed from outside.

He strode through the sitting room, calling, “Violet! Violet!”

expecting her to answer even though it was obvious she was not there.

“Violet,” he said again as he entered her bedchamber.

The bed was empty, though the room still carried the invading scent of her perfume. There were not even any sheets on it. He walked to the wardrobe and opened it. That was empty too. He went to the drawers and pulled the top one open, then the one below it and the one below that. They were all empty.

Why had she gone? Why had she said nothing? Not even goodbye. She’d not even sent a note to say it was over.

He sat on the bed, letting the scents in the room overwhelm him. Where the hell had she gone? And why had she gone without him?

A cough rang from the chamber door, and Geoffrey realised his head was in his hands; with his elbows on his knees he’d covered his face. He felt like weeping. He did not weep; he stood and looked at Selford.

“Where has she gone?”

“I do not know, sir. I was only told she has gone to the country.”

“Where in the country?”

“Honestly, I do not know, my Lord.”

“Does she own any property outside of London?”

“No, sir.”

“Has she gone to a friend’s?”

The butler stepped forward and lifted a hand as if, if it were

appropriate, he might touch Geoffrey's arm, of course he did not.

"I'm sorry, sir. I can give you no more details. Lady Rimes quite specifically did not tell me where she has gone. It was very clear her ladyship did not wish her absence nor her whereabouts, disclosed."

"What?" What on earth was going on? "Selford?"

"Honestly, sir, I have no idea where her ladyship is, and you cannot stay here ..."

No, no! Of course he could not. But where was he to go then? He didn't know any more.

If Barrington was in town, Geoff could go there to talk things out with Robert, but he was not. No one else would understand. Except perhaps Geoff's elder sister. But he could not call there and wake her husband and her household at this hour.

He left in a daze. His walk home felt like a dream. When he reached his bachelor apartments in St James, he wasn't even sure how he'd got there. He lay on his bed, without undressing, a hand on his brow as his alcohol addled brain tried to think everything through.

When he woke it was ten in the morning, and his brain felt no less confused than the night before. The very first thought in his head, was, *why?* The second, *where?*

Desperation turned his stomach as he dressed. How had he got so caught up with Violet? He'd never expected to get tangled up with a woman, not like this. Yet Violet's web had wrapped about him this summer and caught him fast.

Why had she cast him out of it so suddenly? *I don't understand.*

When he left his apartment he did not know where he was heading, but then his feet took him in the direction of her solicitor's office. Surely Mr Larkin would know where Violet had gone.

Geoff's attitude had changed since his assault on her house last night. Last night he had been angry. Today, when he entered the solicitors, he was downtrodden and desolate. He had no expectation. He felt lost. She'd ripped his damned heart out. She'd gone.

It was laughable really. All summer Violet had been busy threatening Lord Barrington with a hard countenance, because she believed Barrington would break her friend's heart. Now she had done it to him.

"Mr Larkin," Geoffrey acknowledged as he was invited in to the office.

The man stood and smiled.

Geoffrey had not mentioned why he'd come yet. He could not find the words.

"Do sit, my Lord. How may I help?"

Mr Larkin wouldn't even know there was a connection between himself and Violet. After all they'd only shared an intrigue. He had no rights regarding her - no right to interfere in her affairs - *except that he loved her*, and he'd thought she'd tumbled into loving him too. It had not been by design. It had just happened. One night of pleasure had become two, then three and

four, and then, and then . . . he'd hated being separated from her.

Damn her. There was a hole in his chest without her here, and it was painful.

Geoff took a seat facing the solicitor feeling like a gullible idiot. He had been used and discarded - while he'd thought himself happy beyond any expectation.

God, was this what his friend Robert had gone through when he'd dropped out of Oxford all those years ago. Insanity threatened at the edge of Geoff's conscious thought, he was too anxious, he'd be admitted to Bedlam in a month if he did not get a hold of this internal ranting.

"My Lord," Larkin prodded.

Geoff sighed. "Look Mr Larkin, I know you manage Lady Rimes affairs for her. She's left town unexpectedly. I wondered if you knew -"

The solicitor sat back in his chair, frowning, as Geoff spoke, then cut in. "I cannot reveal another client's details -"

"I know that but -"

"There is no but, my Lord."

Geoffrey slid forward, to the edge of his chair, with an urge to force the man to listen. "I am worried for her, Larkin. She's disappeared without a word. When . . . when I would not have expected it. Something is a foot, something seems wrong. Just tell me where she has gone so I might see her and know all is well?"

Mr Larkin leaned forwards again too, his hand resting on his

desk. "If Lady Rimes had wished you to know, Lord Sparks, she would have told you. She has not, sir, and so I must respect her choice."

The blood drained from Geoff's head, blurring his vision, while his stomach growled. Stopping to break his fast had not been among his priorities, but the after effects of the alcohol he'd imbibed last night turned his stomach and fogged his head.

He refused to faint like a feeble woman. Resting his forehead on the heel of his palm, his elbow pressing into his thigh, he took a breath. Where the hell had she gone? Why?

The room was weighted with silence. He knew Larkin watched him.

What to do?

"I'm sorry, my Lord, but if that is the only reason you have come ..."
You might as well go. Geoff heard the unspoken words.

He looked up. "Do you know how long she's gone for? When will she be back?" Larkin merely shook his head.

In the years Geoff had known Violet, she'd rarely left London. The only times she had gone, were to follow entertainment; like last year, she'd gone to Bath. Perhaps she had gone to a house party. But this didn't seem like that. If it was simply a house party somewhere, why hadn't she said?

The last time he'd seen her, when he'd left her at her bedchamber door, and her fingers had run across the stubble growing on his cheek, she'd said, "Goodbye Geoffrey."

She had not said, I will see you this evening, or, later. It had

just been goodbye. They'd made no plans.

It had meant goodbye.

But why? There was no point in looking to Larkin for an answer. It was like attempting to draw blood from a stone.

Dependency weighting down his limbs, Geoff stood. "Thank you." He had nothing to thank the man for but the words just slipped from his lips.

When he left, his feet led him back to Violet's house. He did not expect to find her there. Yet he had to be there, because, where-else would he go.

The knocker was *still* in place. That didn't make sense either. Why pretend she was within when she was not?

He lifted it and rapped it down on the iron plaque beneath it thrice. Then stood back a little.

Selford answered it, his eyebrows rising as he opened the door. "Lord Sparks?" There was a note of pity as well as a question in his voice.

Geoffrey pushed past him to enter, shoving the door aside, just like last night.

He'd got nothing from the solicitor but Selford had said some things yesterday. If he pushed the man perhaps he'd say more ...

"Where?" Geoff began as Selford shut the door.

"I do not know, sir."

"Selford ..."

"I swear, my Lord, I can tell you nothing other than my Lady has gone."

Gone. The word had such finality.

“Did she say when she was coming back? How long is she to be away?”

“My Lord ...” Selford said pleadingly.

“Selford, you of all people know how things were. I cannot understand this. She said nothing to me. *How long has she gone for?*”

“I cannot say, my Lord.”

“Give me something. Please, Selford?”

Worry passed across the butler’s stern expression. “My Lord.”

“Selford.” Geoff heard the note of plea in his voice.

The butler frowned and then in a low voice answered, “She is not intending to return, my Lord.”

“Not intending ...” A wash of disbelief swept through Geoff. He moved to the stairs and sat on the second step, feeling faint again as the room darkened at the edges of his vision.

Had he done something wrong? He’d never spoken of his affection. He’d believed his feelings returned. Should he have said something? Would she have stayed if he’d spoken? But surely she knew. He’d not hidden it from his eyes, or his touch. Did she just not care?

His gaze lifted to Selford again. “Tell me what she said? Do you know why she has gone?”

“I should not, my Lord ...” Selford’s statement ended in silence, but Geoff could see the man’s resolve was weakening. He looked uncertain.

“Tell me . . .”

“My Lord, I –”

“Tell me!” Geoff’s pitch grew more forceful.

“Oh.” Selford’s voice dropped to little more than a whisper.

He was going to talk. Geoff stood.

“The house is to be shut up, sir. The knocker has been left in place because Lady Rimes asked that it remain so for a few weeks, as if she were still here, and then the house and everything is to be sold.”

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