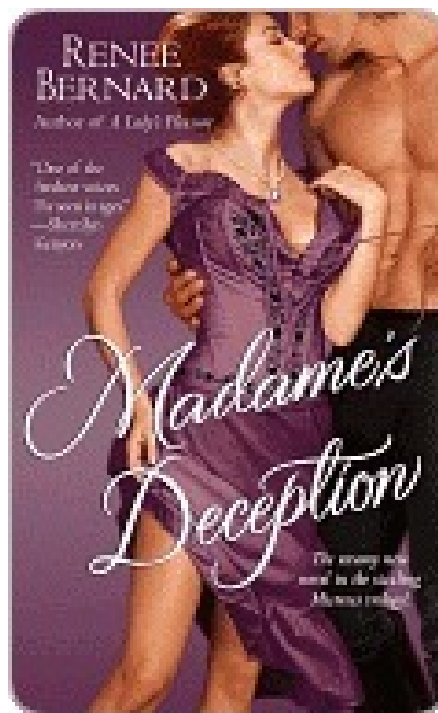




Madame's Deception

Renee Bernard

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Madame's Deception Renee Bernard

When an innocent takes over a bordello, can her seduction be far behind?

Jocelyn Tolliver believes that her mother's couture business financed her European boarding school education. Imagine her shock when she discovers that her dying mother is the infamous Madame of London's elite Crimson Belle. Promising to care for the bordello and its ladies, Jocelyn, a virginal bookworm, transforms herself and is soon known as the reclusive Madame DeBourcier.

Rakish Alex Randall, Lord Colwick, is determined to win admittance to the intriguing Madame's bed. His outrageous attempts to garner her favor cannot go unnoticed for long. When danger threatens the elegant women of the Belle, Jocelyn strikes a bargain with Alex, hoping he can provide some protection. But Jocelyn's deception forces her and Alex into a passionate battle of wills in which all illusions will be shattered... and all desires fulfilled.

Madame's Deception Details

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From Reader Review Madame's Deception for online ebook

Nightwitch says

[he shows up to the brothel where she is the [virginal] madam - consistently spelled "madame" throughout - and essentially throws money at her to become his mistress; she has had the hots for him ever since their first meeting - again, took

J. Leigh Hunter says

Characters

Alex was strong and virile as a lord, if a bit weak at times (and they always are when it comes to professing their love to the heroine.) Jocelyn was fantastic as the mysterious, witty, voluptuous madame of the Crimson Belle. She was all business, even when it came to her feelings for Alex, Lord Colwick. Which lend to her mysterious nature even more.

What I love most is her total lack of experience in the bedroom and how she uses actually booksmarts to educate other women in the bedroom (as she was introduced as doing in "A Lady's Pleasure".) I absolutely love the "innocent playing the whore" plot device.

Story and Writing Style

And much more than the "innocent playing the whore", I love the idea of the hero "buying" the innocent. It was supposed to be a simple affair, but as soiled doves are coming up murdered around London, including one of Jocelyn's own, Alex takes it upon himself to get to the bottom of the problem. How much is he willing to put at stake when his reputation comes into play?

Sex

Hurried and hot. Alex's emotional interest in her, in addition to her desire to stay at the Crimson Belle—and not be put up in a house by Alex's accounts—made him almost sick with need, forcing him to go to the Belle whenever he could for trysts with the madame. I felt that Jocelyn was too cool at times, but I felt they were both equals in the bedroom, and it was a good romp (or five.)

Silvia says

Jocelyn vivía en un internado desde que era una niña, sumida en la inocencia y separada de su madre durante periodos de tiempo. Eso le llevó a desconocer la verdadera identidad de su madre, que era ni más ni menos que la dueña, la *madame*, de un exquisito burdel llamado "La Bella Carmesí". En cuanto su madre enferma gravemente, Jocelyn acude a su encuentro y ya en su lecho de muerte, le es confesada su identidad y cual será su misión de ahora en adelante: retomar su puesto, heredar el burdel y empaparse de ésta vida de vicios y juegos candentes.

Transcurren unos diez años y Jocelyn se ha adaptado a la perfección a su nueva vida, lleva el negocio como si hubiera nacido en el mismo seno y goza de la protección de guardaespaldas, así como de la compañía de sus lascivas y picaras chicas, a las que debe cuidar e instruir.

Su vida sufrirá un vuelco enorme cuando un aristócrata se "obsesiona" con ella y es capaz de pagar una considerable suma de dinero por su compañía. Al mismo tiempo, se producirán una serie de asesinatos que afectarán notablemente a "La Bella Carmesí"...

Hay libros que pasan desapercibidos. Tal vez dependa del país en el que se publiquen, pero al menos aquí este libro no ha tenido tanta fama como podría tenerla en Estados Unidos, Inglaterra, a lo mejor Francia... Ciertamente, es una lástima que pase desapercibido. A un económico precio de 3 euros, edición de bolsillo... pude hacerme con él. De acuerdo, la portada no es de las más atractivas que uno se pueda encontrar en el mercado, pero, vamos, por ese precio y, por esa magnífica sinopsis, hay que darle una oportunidad. Estoy muy contenta por la compra que hice, una pena que haya tardado tanto en hincarle el diente... En sus 247 páginas me he podido encontrar con intriga, romance, sexo desenfrenado, sutiles diálogos y personajes carismáticos, además de una muy buena ambientación (s. XIX).

"El pacto de una dama" forma parte de una trilogía de **Renee Bernard**, concretamente es el segundo libro y sin haberme leído el primero, no ha habido ningún problema. Eso sí, habiéndome informado del anterior volumen, tengo entendido que Alex, el protagonista masculino, ya conoce a la madame Jocelyn. Por eso, en este libro, Alex ya tiene la idea en mente de volver a encontrársela. El caso es que en un libro de escasas páginas (habiéndome leído libros de 800, claro (?)), me he podido topar con lo justo e imprescindible.

Entretenido, no me ha aburrido y no hay nada más gratificante que un libro te mantenga despierto hasta las últimas páginas.

No lo calificaría de predecible aunque su historia se base en un tópico. Una mujer que se dedica a la prostitución y que, poco a poco, va entablando un romance con un lord, es un tema ya tratado anteriormente pero, todo dependerá de la pluma de la escritora y los demás elementos que conforman el libro (como la intriga tras los asesinatos, los líos entre los personajes...), que lo hacen excepcional.

Jocelyn es la protagonista, una mujer que a pesar de trabajar... en lo que trabaja, conserva un aura de inocencia que su lord romperá. Eso no significa que sea boba. Un detalle insignificante la hace parecer pura e inocente y sin embargo es una mujer de armas tomar, que carga con el negocio a sus espaldas sin destrozarse el tocado. Su elegancia y, a veces, su orgullo por querer tener el control de todo lo que acontece a su alrededor llaman la atención de lord Colwick, **Alex**, quien no descansará hasta conseguir tomarla.

"Prefiero que me prometas la luna, Alex"

En un mundo de vicios, donde el amor puede ser confundido fácilmente por la lujuria o la pasión, ambos personajes lograrán encontrar la distinción.

Ha sido divertido ver su juegos de tira y afloja.... fallidos, pues en el fondo se deseaban tanto que se notaba a mil leguas. Me ha gustado como Alex, un personaje tremendamente serio que ha intentado durante toda su vida no seguir los pasos de su padre, todo un libertino... se las apaña para no levantar sospechas e ir al encuentro de su dama. Alex es un buen personaje, sí señor. Su seriedad roza la frialdad cuando se encuentra en bailes de temporada y en muchas ocasiones me ha sonsacado una sonrisa ver que él tenía que mostrarse cortés por narices, cuando lo que realmente quería era huir... hacia Jocelyn, su vía de escape.

De personajes secundarios encontramos unas cuantas damas de compañía de "La Bella Carmesí"... Todas

ellas muy tiernas, que contrasta con la sensualidad que debe desprender una dama de compañía y es que la autora se ha encargado de hacémoslas ver como muchachas que viven bajo la protección de los guardaespaldas y de Jocelyn. **Ramis**, la mano derecha de Jocelyn es un hombretón de color, totalmente serio y profesional, que acompañará y aconsejara a la madame cuando ésta se sienta sola. Otro muy buen personaje.

En pocas palabras, me alegro mucho de haber dado con este libro... Me ha servido para entretenerme y pasar un buen rato. Ver como culmina su amor ha sido asombroso, de verdad. Un excelente buen final.

Ritsky says

It has a promising start: a virgin running a bordello and a man lusting over her without realizing (at first) how innocent her was, and a steamy agreement between the two. but like another reviewer said: nothing much happens (except the sex). Having read Renee Bernard, I should have anticipated this, but hey, the base plot is too good to be left out.

Usually, I have quite some tolerance for loopholes in romance, especially regarding the setting (the bordello is like a 'candyland', yes) and historical accuracy, but at least I was hoping for some character explorations. I like a nice hero and I don't mind Alex minding much about his position among the ton, but I think he was not doing anything worthy of Jocelyn. And the way they end up together, I was like 'just like that?'. At the end of the book, I failed to symphatize with either characters.

At least I finished this. :-)

Cherise says

Renee Bernards writing makes it very easy to fall into the story and enjoy her books. The sex scenes in this book are steamy and the characters are great, yet something holds me back from "loving it".

In the previous book the plot was a tad far fetched, but I had no trouble buying into that HEA.

This story had a little more depth of emotion and the plot more believable, yet everything happened to fast for me. I didn't have a chance to settle in on the HEA, though I wanted both characters to get there.

Both stories have an abundance of graphic sex scenes (YAY!)and characters that are easy to fall in love with. Not sure why I liked the first one more, especially since I liked the characters in this one more. I am interested in seeing what the third book does for me.

Desty says

Jocelyn mendapatkan kabar kalau ibunya sedang sekarat. Dia segera pulang untuk menemui ibunya, dan benar saja ibunya memang sedang sakit. Sebelum meninggal, ibunya membuat Jocelyn berjanji untuk meneruskan usaha rumah bordir yang dikelolanya. Meski terkejut dengan usaha milik ibunya, Jocelyn tetap berjanji pada ibunya.

9 tahun kemudian, Jocelyn kini lebih dikenal dengan nama Madame DeBourcier, pemilik usaha rumah bordir Crimson Belle. Di sana dia "mengasuh" beberapa wanita dan juga memberi bekal pengetahuan bagi wanita-wanita itu. Banyak rival bisnisnya yang iri dengan Crimson Belle.

Alex Randall, Lord Colwick, selalu didesak oleh saudaranya untuk segera mencari istri. Tapi Alex malah berpikiran lain. Dia pergi mengunjungi Crimson Belle dan bertemu dengan Madame DeBourcier. Sebelumnya mereka pernah bertemu, ketika Alex mempertanyakan wanita asuhan Madame DeBourcier yang telah dinikahi oleh temannya, Drake. Kedatangan Alex kali ini adalah untuk meminta Madame DeBourcier untuk menjadi simpanannya selama satu season. Jocelyn menerima dengan syarat mereka tidak akan pernah keluar dari Crimson Belle, dan tentu saja sejumlah uang yang besar. Alex tidak tanggung-tanggung. Baru saja mengajukan proposal, dia sudah nyosor duluan.

Akhirnya berjalanlah kesepakatan antara Jocelyn dan Alex. Ketika Alex mengetahui bahwa Jocelyn masih perawan, dia heran dan bertanya-tanya. Soalnya Jocelyn ini sudah terlihat berpengalaman dari caranya mendekati Alex. Jocelyn pun buka kartu kalau dia tahunya dari membaca buku-buku. Dia bahkan mengajak Alex melihat perpustakaan pribadinya. Yah sekalian praktek isi dari salah satu buku acuanya Jocelyn. Lama kelamaan Alex menyadari kalau dia membutuhkan Jocelyn, bukan hanya sebagai seorang simpanan.

Selain kisah Alex-Jocelyn, ada juga tambahan kisah misterius pembunuhan wanita-wanita dari rumah bordir. Jadi semacam ada pembunuhan berantai dimana sasarannya adalah para wanita penghibur itu. Jocelyn sempat takut, tapi ya kan ada Alex yang mengalihkan perhatiannya.

Kenapa saya hanya ngasih bintang 2? Ya karena isi buku ini lebih fokus ke hubungan fisik antara Alex dan Jocelyn. Jangan berharap banyak soal misteri pembunuhan itu, hanya sekadar tempelan saja kok. Buat nambah-nambah intrik.

Daneesha says

i am so mad at renee bernard. what exactly was the plot of this book?

1. OK, so i get that jocelyn inherits a "house of ill repute" from her mother...but then, the book fast forwards like years later...and she's well settled into the role. now, the male character (alex) and jocelyn have met before in previous book...but the thing is, i read that book some time ago, and don't remember. there was hardly any background on the meeting..not even a flashback.

2. you don't really get to know these characters. they seem flat. why does jocelyn seem to settle into this role so easily? why does alex hate being called saint alex? i wanted more depth into what made them the way they were. even the "girls" at the bordello were boring.

3. there was so much sex and no substance. i don't mind the sex, but i like a story to go with it. this was just alex going to the bordello every day and having mind blowing sex with jocelyn... of course, they fall in love...yet they know nothing really about each other...sigh.

4. i hated the ending. there was a useless surprise shocker at the end about jocelyn's parentage...and the murder "mystery" that was sprinkled throughout was wrapped up in one paragraph. not good enough.

i expected more, especially since i have liked two other novels by this author.

steer clear.

Ana Maria says

Las historia de Alex, lord Colwick, el amigo del duque del libro anterior. Con una vida seria y ordenada motivada por los traumas generados por su libertino padre, no tiene la mejor idea de quedar prendado de madame DeBoucier, la dueña de un elegante burdel de Londres.

Pero madame, Jocelyn, en realidad heredó el burdel de su madre y sólo lo administra. Pero al conocer al insistente Alex decide hacer un trato con él... mientras dure la temporada.

Pero la aparente paz se ve alterada por una serie de crímenes de prostitutas.

Bien, como el anterior tiene muchas escenas sexuales. Pero son sumamente tiernas y quedé encantada.

El problema es que el tema de los asesinatos y otras cuestiones, como las diferencias sociales, fueron tratadas muy superficialmente a pesar de que eran muy importante en la trama.

El desenlace fue muy rápido y hubiera querido un pelín más de participación de Alex.

Igual me gustó, sobre todo recomendada para las que les gustan las eróticas-históricas.

Lelyana's Reviews says

This book was a soft porn after all and Alex was so cool at the lovemaking scene. Lol ...

Keluar dari sekolah for ladies yg bergengsi, hanya untuk di hadapkan pada kenyataan mewarisi rumah pelacuran paling top di London sejak kematian ibu nya, Jocelyn menjadi germo di usia 18 tahun.

9 tahun kemudian, setelah beberapa bulan tidak bertemu dengan Alex , Lord Colwick, mereka bertemu kembali karena obsesi Alex yang tidak bisa di bendung terhadap Jocelyn.

Bertamu di Crimson Belle, Alex minta bertemu dengan sang Madame, membuat Jocelyn heran dengan tawaran Alex untuk "memiliki" Jocelyn untuk dirinya sendiri selama satu season.

Dengan harga 10.000 Pundsterling , di sepakati 'perjanjian bisnis' mereka, dan Alex yang tidak mau membuang-buang waktu dengan investasinya, langsung melakukan serangan saat itu terhadap Jocelyn. Haha ! [image error]

Ada sedikit variasi, dengan adanya pembunuhan gadis-gadis yang melibatkan secra langsung Crimson Belle, tapi so far, ceritanya memang berputar-putar antara lovemaking SAlex dan Jocelyn yg very hot...skandal terjadi lagi, seperti buku sebelum nya dimana sahabat Alex, Drake sang Deadly Duke menikahi janda simpanannya.

Hm, buku nya memang about scandal, so what can I say..

But so far, lumayan entertaining sih buat yang suka uhuk uhuk... hahaha

Wait...saat lovemaking pertama mereka Alex shock berat dengan kenyataan bahwa ternyata sang Madam pemilik rumah pelacuran elite di London itu, ternyata masih perawan ! [image error]

Waktu ditanya kenapa, Jocelyn mengatakan kalau kehidupan pribadinya dengan bisnis tidak ada hubungannya. Makin heran Alex , kenapa dia yang diminati Jocelyn untuk jadi yang "pertama".

Bahkan di pesta dansa yang menampilkan perempuan2 pilihan kalangan bangsawan, Alex tidak bergeming. Dan waktu dia mengatakan pada Jocelyn bahwa dia tidak bisa berhenti memikirkan Jocelyn, dalam hati Jocelyn ketawa dan mengatakan, ya iyalah, kalau yg di pertaruhkan adalah 10.000 Pounds, dia juga tidak akan berhenti memikirkan transaksi itu. Hahhaha [image error]

Saat bersama, Alex di ajak Jocelyn ke perpustakaan nya yg penuh dengan buku-buku teori tentang lovemaking...dan Alex minta "di ajarkan" apa yang di pelajari oleh Jocelyn. Hm, katanya sih Alex akan jadi murid yang baik...dan Alex was so cool , sampai2 guru nya, Madame DeBouncier terkagum2 dengan 'kemampuan' murid nya . hoho....

Terjadi pembunuhan yg melibatkan secara langsung Crimson Belle, namun cerita nya memang paling fokus pada lovemaking Alex dan Jocelyn yang pada akhirnya di ketahui umum dan menimbulkan skandal besar. Well, cukup entertaining, terutama buat yang suka cerita berbau erotica dan uhuk uhuk yang banyak..... Buat yang mengharapkan cerita yang rumit dan mengharu biru, this one is not for you....

Jen says

I vaguely remember reading Bernard's first novel, *A Lady's Pleasure*, but I obviously didn't enjoy it since I'd have recalled some defining detail.

I like heroines who aren't simpering virgin waifs, and have at least some initiative to take what she wants, and Jocelyn lacks none of that, despite being forcibly thrown into her dead mother's "trade". Alex Randall (who should perhaps be renamed Lord Randy) is determined to have the mysterious wench for himself, and willingly forks out the 10,000 pounds for such an honour. Of course, the conquest is only half-satisfactory and soon he wants Jocelyn in her entirety, though their social standings are some cause for a rift.

The love scenes in this novel are sizzling, although I could do without the truly lame euphemism for semen (I shall let you find out for yourself and chortle along with me) if the writer's going to be so explicit as to use the term "clit". Seriously!

In any case, too much sex and not enough plot leaves me stone-cold regardless. Underlying all this passion and intrigue there is a thriller in the spirit of Jack the Ripper, although one wouldn't really think so given that Bernard doesn't give it the attention it deserves—which is unfortunate. I imagine she could have done something creative with such a sub-plot under her wing.

It also would have been interesting to see how Jocelyn, having come immediately from a sheltered and privileged background into a foreign and seedy business, would have adjusted to something she might have considered as nefarious or scandalous. It cannot have been easy to adapt to. I suppose that would have cost a lot of unaffordable exposition. Unaffordable perhaps, but it would have strengthened this weak plot immensely!

Laura Darcy says

Adeptes depuis maintenant plusieurs années de la collection aventures et passions de chez J'ai Lu pour toutes leurs romances historiques qui savent faire fondre mon cœur de midinette! J'ai voulu testé leur dernière nouveauté, la collection aventures, passions et sensualité. Que de promesses!

Sensualité est un terme qui lui va bien, tout comme rondeur et douceur. L'histoire sans être transcendante m'a vraiment fait passer un bon moment. Il m'a juste manqué un je-ne-sais-quoi pour en faire un coup de cœur.

La première chose qui m'a fait aimer cette romance est le fait que nous sommes plongés dans l'univers d'une maison close. Je crois d'ailleurs que c'est la première fois que je lis un aventures et passions sur ce thème, alors que celui des clubs de jeux pour hommes sont légions dans le domaine. Un peu de changement ne fait pas de mal!

Je n'ai pas pu m'empêcher de faire le rapprochement avec la série TV « Maison close » de Canal + et de me projeter dans le décor aux couleurs chaudes, chatoyantes et à la lumière tamisée. Cette traversée fugace, car il n'y a qu'un peu plus de 300 pages, dans une maison close de Londres a été un vrai délice.

La seconde chose qui m'a plu est justement le fait que le livre est assez court pour que l'intrigue ne traîne pas en longueur. Très souvent le défaut de ce genre de romance est de multiplier les rebondissements qui retardent une fin inévitable. Ici, l'histoire se met doucement en place et les sentiments des personnages apparaissent progressivement. De plus, Renee Bernard a enrichi la romance d'une mini intrigue policière pour réveiller nos émotions.

Alors que la mode est au sexe pour le sexe dans les livres et que le sujet est la prostitution, la romance aurait pu tomber dans le travers de scènes de sexe trop graphique. Heureusement ce n'est pas le cas! Même si, j'ai trouvé que l'auteure aurait pu éviter une ou deux scènes de sexe qui sont assez régulières.

Jocelyn est une jeune fille qui a été élevée pour devenir une dame, malheureusement le métier de sa mère la rattrape et ses rêves s'évaporent comme neige au soleil. Elle prend la direction de la maison close et c'est là qu'elle fera la rencontre d'Alex. Ce dernier est un gentleman de la société londonienne qui a en horreur le scandale. Il veut absolument éviter que son nom et sa réputation, déjà mal mené par son père, soient associés à la maison close. Partant de là, on sait très bien qu'il y a une différence entre les souhaits et la réalité!

Alex est un personnage que j'ai beaucoup apprécié car il est loin d'avoir l'arrogance d'un homme bien né qui regarderait de haut les petites gens. Il s'érige en tant que protecteur de Jocelyn et veut l'aider. A aucun moment, il se sent supérieur ; c'est ce trait de caractère qui a attiré ma sympathie pour ce personnage.

Bref, une belle romance qui s'insère parfaitement dans la mode actuelle. Certes, un contrat lie les deux héros mais heureusement, pas de sadomasochisme derrière. C'est une trame classique pour un aventures et passions mais agrémenté de sensualité!

Eviltwinjen says

Let me preface this review by saying that something about Bernard keeps drawing me back in, despite the

total preposterousness of her plots. Since reading her short story, "Mischiefs Holiday", in Sabrina Jeffries' *The School for Heiresses* (which was hot), I've kept hoping her novels would be on that level. *A Lady's Pleasure* had good sex but the plot was bizarre, and *Madame's Deception* had a great concept and pretty good sex but *nothing happened*. I never thought I'd be complaining about too much sex and not enough plot, but...here we are.

The idea is that sweet, virginal, well-educated Jocelyn Tolliver discovers at age 18 that her mother, who she thought was a fashionable dressmaker, was actually a notorious Madam who ran the Crimson Belle (our heroine has been in boarding school pretty much all her life). On her deathbed, mom makes Jocelyn promise to run the brothel and protect its employees, and so a prim virgin becomes the new madam. Conveniently, the Crimson Belle is a high-class place with a faithful manservant to protect it, and Jocelyn never appears without a mask to protect her identity. She wins the hearts of the girls with generous pay and tutors, etc., and teaches herself about sex from books. Then our hero comes along and tempts her to take on her own "client." Meanwhile, there's a plot about a serial killer targeting prostitutes that you keep thinking will eventually become important but that peters out with a whimper. In the end, Jocelyn simply leaves the brothel in the care of Faithful Manservant and enters society under her real name so she can marry Our Hero, and no one ever asks questions or suspects a thing. Yep.

Still, Bernard's characters are so *nice*. The dialogue is good, the sex is lusty and unusually creative, but that plot...it's like she's not even trying.

Katie(babs) says

The Crimson Belle is London's most elite brothel that caters to most gentlemen, but always for a price. Madame DeBourcier runs her establishment with an iron fist. Most of the patrons don't even know what Madame looks like. She is a secret to all, which even includes the women who work for her. But one London gentleman has had the honor of meeting with Madame personally. Alex Randal, Lord Colwick, came to Madame for help for a friend of his. And when he first met the owner of The Belle, he was struck speechless. He was expecting to see a much older and hardened woman. Instead, he was introduced to a very young and beautiful woman, almost as young as her employees. Alex is quite smitten and wants her as his mistress. Whatever price Madame will name, he will meet so he can stay in her bed and enjoy her company in more earthly ways.

Madame DeBourcier's real name is Jocelyn Tolliver. She took over the brothel from her mother, who has been dead for a decade. Jocelyn never knew who her mother really was because she made sure Jocelyn was away at school and led her to believe that she was an esteemed dressmaker. But Jocelyn had nowhere else to turn, so she took over the reigns of her mother's business, making it very profitable. Jocelyn also has secrets. She hides herself away knowing she will never be welcomed in polite society and learns about the intimacies between men and women from what her ladybirds do every night. Her education also includes a very extensive personal library of erotic literature. She seems at ease with her life, but when Alex comes to her wanting to experience more personal matters of the flesh, she is willing. She wants to do everything she has read about in her special books and have a bit of happiness with a man like Alex, even though they have no real future together.

Alex and Jocelyn embark on a very passionate love affair within the walls of The Belle. Alex is smitten with his innocent but all too willing Madame. Jocelyn also enjoys Alex's company, which includes the way he makes her feel, especially when they make love because it is unlike anything she has read. But real life

intrudes on these two lovers as Alex's sister wants to see him marry. As the bodies of dead women from various other brothels are found strangled and beaten, Alex is also worried for Jocelyn's well being, especially when threats against her and her business are practically being thrown at her front door.

Renee Bernard had a big winner with her first book, *A LADY'S PLEASURE*, where Jocelyn and Alex were first introduced. Now with *MADAME'S DECEPTION*, she has written a very mature, but still passionate romance between two very interesting individuals. Jocelyn is a pleasant surprise because she is not what she seems. I was expecting a very mature and pessimistic woman because of her profession. But instead, Bernard writes a character who, although not naïve, is still very innocent about sex. The major secret Jocelyn is hiding is pretty easy to uncover and may make some reader's roll their eyes, but the way Jocelyn's situation was written actually works in the long run. Alex is a wonderful hero who thinks with his heart. He too is not what he seems, mainly because he is not some rakish lover of hundreds of woman. He is a very normal sort of fellow who is so enamored of Jocelyn, that it is simply adorable to read about. Of course, the world of prostitution is a bit fairy tale like with no harsh realities intruding. If you can suspend your disbelief, this is one story where you hope everyone will have a happily ever after. There is a bit of a mystery, some deaths, and yes, even more secrets, mainly about Jocelyn, but overall, *MADAME'S DECEPTION* delivers a nicely written erotic romance. The only deception I could find was Jocelyn keeping her erotic literature a secret from her girls and that of her lover, Alex. It just shows that reading is fundamental, especially when finding pleasure and, ultimately, love.

Nicola O. says

Just finished this one; Bernard is a new-to-me author. I'd call this slightly elevated soft porn more than romance. The ratio of explicit sex scenes to scenes without actual penetration is eyebrow-raisingly high, and trust me, I'm no prude about my reading material.

So, just being extremely sexed-up wouldn't be a reason for me to knock it down to two stars; in fact, the erotica is fairly well done. The writing and dialog in general is entirely competent. However, the resolution of the conflict in the end was ridiculously facile. The situation was set up as pretty much impossible, and the resolution was just a hand-wave--"Oh, nevermind!" The characters didn't grab me that much either. Not terrible, but not great, and there wasn't enough otherwise to make me go back to this author.

Lassarina Aoibhell says

The concept of this book is delightful: a virgin as madam of a notorious bordello. I am happy to say that it lived up to its promise.

Jocelyn was the young daughter of the madam of the Crimson Belle, sent away to boarding school so that she would not know what her mother did. Upon overhearing the mistress of her school discussing the fact that her mother was ill, Jocelyn made her way to London and found her mother on her deathbed. She promised to take over the Belle, and then we skip forward to the meat of the story.

The Crimson Belle is not a downtrodden mess of a brothel; the women are educated, and have access to medical care, and Jocelyn encourages them to have dreams and go about their way. It's used as a foil to the typical establishment (as owned by Jocelyn's rival, Mr. Marsh.) I can't help but notice parallels to some of

the current conversations around sex work and sex workers, which I am sure is not an accident.

In any event, Our Hero, Alex, is determined to get under Jocelyn's skirts, and so he makes an offer to her for her companionship. Jocelyn accepts, and much of the story is about their growing relationship and how the women of the Belle make him re-examine his thoughts about how they all came to be there.

There are other stories going on; the women of the higher tier London brothels are being stalked and murdered by a mysterious figure (which is woven in well to the rest of the story; all the right hints are there so that the reveal is a logical result rather than "what the hell just happened there?") and there is the question of Alex's need to eventually shop for a bride.

I really liked this book overall; the sexy scenes were delightfully hot, and the conversations were the right kind of tense. The plot didn't rely on people failing to talk to each other, which is a huge pet peeve of mine. The characters' evolving feelings were played out in a logical way, and I really liked Jocelyn and all the side characters at the Belle. Though the book is clearly the second in a series, there were enough hints about the preceding book to intrigue me while not making me feel lost. I look forward to more from this author.
