

The background of the page is a photograph of an open window. The window is framed by a stone archway. The window is open, and the view outside shows a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, and the sky is filled with clouds. The water is dark, and the overall scene is romantic and atmospheric.

## Synopsis: Court of Love

### Enpointe For Love

Russian ballerina Veronika Dubova is thrilled to be performing at London's Loveland Theatre. Even more thrilling is the nightly attendance of Simon Ardleigh, Duke of Wentworth, with his mesmerizing emerald eyes and wild, untamed look that made her picture him riding the open moors rather than watching her in *La Sylphide*. But watch her he did. Intently. Night after night.

Of course, no English nobleman would consider a public liaison with a dancer. Ballet was only a cut above burlesque in 1850's London and he was betrothed to a shy, little mouse who happened to be the niece of former Prime Minister Palmerson, which practically put him at direct odds with Mother Russia and the Ottoman empire.

But when England declares war and Veronika and her partner, Evgenii, are to be arrested on suspicion of being Russian spies, Simon steps in, offering to vouch for them and provide shelter in his home. Determined not to succumb to becoming his mistress, Veronika tries to avoid him, which isn't easy to do in his own house. Equally determined to fulfill his political obligations by marrying a woman he has nothing in common with, Simon finds himself struggling to remain honorable as he is drawn to Veronika's fiery temperament and independent thinking.

If only life were so simple that one could actually consider love, but there is always duty. Something an English duke cannot overlook.

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### Season of Love

As a vicar's orphaned daughter, Elizabeth Townsend is grateful to her uncle, the Earl of Dewberry, for taking her into his household. In her twenties, she is old enough to serve as chaperone to her younger cousins who are eagerly anticipating their first season in Town. Elizabeth is happy for them, even though she has no liking for London. Working in hospitals in the seedier parts of the city with her father has given her a different perspective. She much prefers her uncle's country estate.

Thrown from her horse after a buck leaps out from the brush, she attempts to hobble home, only to find she has badly sprained her ankle. Sitting on the edge of the road, contemplating what to do, she is surprised when a young man canters by and stops to offer assistance. He almost looks like some gallant knight of old with his raven hair curling over the open collar of a cravat-less shirt and no waistcoat. When he lifts her astride his horse as though she weighed no more than a sack of feathers, she wonders if she had become delusional, but the warmth of his muscular body pressed against her back tells her otherwise.

He asks her name and tells her he is Darian, a soldier returning from the Continent and that his parents run the neighboring estate of the Duke of Stafford. For a brief moment, she allows herself a bit of fanciful romance which ends all too soon when her uncle's groomsman meets up with them in a carriage to take her home.

Elizabeth is even more delighted when an invitation comes the next day inviting the family to a ball at the duke's home before the start of the official trek into Town for the season. Even though she is too old to be a debutante and has no dowry to offer a member of the aristocracy, the son of an overseer would be a plausible match. Would she even get a glimpse of Darian that night? She fervently hoped so.

Wishes have odd ways of coming true. Not only did she see Darian, but she was introduced to him—Darian, the duke's heir, and the Marquess of Bingington. He was totally out of her league. Totally.

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### Love Waits

Unhappily married to an English baron, Irish-born Dacey O'Connor is left penniless when he dies in a duel with a cuckolded-husband and his brother inherits the barony. The new baron gives her a small pittance and refuses to return her dowry—twenty head of prize Andalusian horses.

The Duchess of Devonshire, a distant relative, graciously offers her a place to stay. Devastated, Dacey accepts, even though she has no desire to be part of the haute society that is the English *ton*—or the odd triangle that Georgina Spencer and Bess Armstrong have with William Cavendish, the Duke of Devonshire. She longs to go home to Ireland and when the duchess extends the offer to oversee the care of her children, Dacey is only too happy to do so.

Georgiana, ever the social butterfly, is determined to introduce her to eligible men, even though Dacey has no desire to be involved with the insincere way London society plays at the game of love. Still, when Andrew Alcott, barrister and friend of Cavendish, is introduced, she grudgingly admits she is attracted to him, but only because he shares a love of horse-breeding, a topic that would make most ladies swoon. He's far too good-looking for his own good with a thick, tawny mane and unusual golden eyes that study her far too intently. Not to mention that he has a reputation as a rake and managed to avoid the parson's noose at the age of thirty. Not that she was looking for a husband. She'd already had one of those cheaters. The last thing she wanted was another one. No thanks. Still—*conversing* with Andrew was more enjoyable than listening to the high-fashion prattle of the women.

Complicating things further, the duke offers Dacey a proposition. A year as his second mistress in exchange for the purchase and return of her horses. She can't even imagine what a *ménage-a-quatre* would actually *do*, let alone take part in it.

When she lets it slip to Andrew that the duke made an offer to return her horses, Andrew thinks it is because she has taken on the responsibility of the children and tells her it is a good idea and to go ahead. Stunned and appalled that he would condone such a sexual liaison, she runs from him, leaving him staring in bewilderment.

The web continues to tangle as one misunderstanding follows another. How long will love wait?