



Pistols for Two (Regency Romances)

By Georgette Heyer

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Intrigue, elegance, and glittering romance...

In eleven charming short stories, the Queen of Regency romance presents an exquisite romp through affairs of honor and affairs of the heart. Featuring rakes and rascals, orphans and heirs, beauties and their beaus, the legendary Georgette Heyer's signature wit and inimitable style bring the Regency world dazzlingly alive.

"Sparkling ... The stories run the gamut from cloak-and-dagger to whimsical-comedy."—Best Sellers

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WHAT READERS ARE SAYING:

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GEORGETTE HEYER wrote over fifty novels, including Regency romances, mysteries, and historical fiction. She was known as the Queen of Regency romance, and was legendary for her research, historical accuracy, and her extraordinary plots and characterizations.

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Pistols for Two (Regency Romances) By Georgette Heyer Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #67590 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-02-01
- Released on: 2012-02-07
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"* "Wonderful characters, elegant, witty writing, perfect period detail, and rapturously romantic. Georgette Heyer achieves what the rest of us only aspire to." - Katie Fforde * "My favourite historical novelist - stylish, romantic, sharp, and witty. Her sense of period is superb, her heroines are enterprising, and her heroes dashing. I owe her many happy hours." - Margaret Drabble * "A writer of great wit and style - I've read her books to ragged shreds." - Kate Fenton, Daily Telegraph * "Every girl, whatever her age, needs her own complete set of Heyer titles. More than romantic they are witty, elegant, stylish and the best comedies of manners since Jane Austen. Required reading for everyone." --Diane Pearson

About the Author

Georgette Heyer's historical novels have charmed and delighted millions of readers. She wrote over 50 books, including Regency romances, mysteries and historical fiction. She was known as the Queen of Regency romance, and was legendary for her research, historical accuracy, and her extraordinary plots and characterizations.

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Pistols for Two

1

In the end, the quarrel, smouldering for so many weeks, flared up over such a trifle that anyone, Tom reflected, would have laughed to have known the cause. Only they had not really reached pistol-point because Jack had stepped backward in a doorway, and cannoned into him, making him spill his glass of champagne, and treading on his foot. Nor had Jack turned pale and tight-lipped with anger because he had cursed him for being a clumsy oaf. If you had known a fellow from the cradle, had played with him, gone to school with him, shot, fished, and hunted with him, you could curse him with impunity, and either it ended in a bout of fisticuffs or in laughter: not in a meeting in the chill morning, attended by seconds. Even had they not been such close friends that sort of thing was out of date: rubbishy stuff, fit only for the stage! Tom's grandfather, of course, had been out five times, if the family legends were to be believed, on the most trifling provocation. He had once fought Jack's great-uncle George – and very comical they must have looked, Jack and he had often thought, giggling over it, with their shaven polls (for they had worn wigs, both of them), and the absurd ruffles they affected in place of wristbands, and had to tuck up, and their bare feet probably much bruised by the unkind ground. Nowadays, if one fought a duel, one chose pistols, and one didn't make a cake of oneself over the business. But very few people did fight duels, and certainly not because they had been jostled in doorways.

Only it wasn't that. This unthinkable situation had arisen out of something far more serious. Not that one could call Marianne Treen serious: she was the gayest and most light-hearted of all possible causes of dissension.

Strange what changes a few years could wreak in a female! There had been nothing remarkable in little Marianne Treen before she went south to boarding-school: in fact Tom could distinctly recall that he and Jack and Harry Denver had thought her a silly creature, with freckles on her nose, and a tiresome way of

intruding where girls were not wanted. Her departure from Yorkshire left their withers unwrung; and since she spent her holidays in London, with her grandmama, they were very soon able to forget her.

But she had come back to Yorkshire. She had enjoyed a brilliant London season, and when most of the haut ton had gone to Brighton, Mrs Treen had brought her home to Treen Hall, and the neighbourhood had renewed their acquaintance with her at one of the assemblies at High Harrowgate. A stunning shock that had been to all the young gentlemen for miles around, for who would have supposed that this dazzling beauty was none other than freckled little Marianne, who was used to whine: 'Let me come with you! Oh, pray, let me come too!'

They rarely had let her, and now she had her revenge on them. Only she was too sweet and too gay to care for that, and if she did favour some more than others it was easy to see that she used her best endeavours to be impartial.

Jack and Tom were her favourites, as they were certainly the most assiduous, of her courtiers. Everyone laughed at this, and they were roasted a little for doing everything together, even when it came to falling in love for the first time. That did nothing to soothe exacerbated tempers. It was a strange and a deplorable circumstance that one's relatives were unable to see when one was in earnest, but, on the contrary, laboured under the delusion that if one had not yet come down from Oxford one was too young to think of marriage.

Each knew himself to be an eligible suitor. Perhaps Jack had a little the advantage over Tom, for his father was a baronet. But Tom's father was the Squire, which counted for something, and Tom was his only son, whereas Jack had two younger brothers to be provided for.

At first their courtship had been unattended by any rancour. They were agreed that Marianne was incomparable, and their rivalry had been conducted in the friendliest spirit. Perhaps neither knew when the change had crept into their relationship with one another. Perhaps Jack was jealous of Tom's superior height, and breadth of shoulder (sure to appeal to a female!); perhaps Tom envied Jack his air of elegance, and his handsome profile. Whatever the cause, the rift appeared between them. They had become hostile, each eyeing the other with suspicion, each on the watch for any cause for offence. A dozen times they had come within an ace of indulging in a brawl; but never until this disastrous night had they considered the possibility of settling their quarrel at dawn, in Stanhope's Clearing – by tradition an honourable meeting-place.

That Marianne would choose one or other of them before the summer ended neither doubted. The only question was which it would be, and this made it of paramount importance that neither should steal an unfair advantage over the other. After one or two squabbles they had agreed to this – or so Tom had believed, until on this night of the Treens' Dress Party he had beheld with his own eyes the proof of Jack's perfidy. Both had meant to send Marianne a posy of flowers to carry at the ball, with a suitable message attached to the holder: which posy she chose would clearly indicate her heart's preference. Tom had bullied the Squire's head gardener into making up an exquisite bouquet of pink roses and sweet-peas. He had ridden over to Treen Hall himself that morning, to leave the tribute with the Treens' quelling butler, and the most shocking mischance had occurred. The mare had been stung by a horsefly, and Tom, that bruising rider, lost in some beatific dream, and riding with a loose rein and his head in the clouds, had abruptly parted company with Bess. Alas for the delicate bouquet grasped in his right hand! A shower of petals in the road, a dismal array of broken stalks in the filigree holder: that was all that remained of it.

He had only just caught Bess when, as ill-fortune would have it, Jack came driving along the road from Melbury Court in his smart new tilbury. A bouquet of yellow roses lay on the seat beside him, so that there was no need to enquire his errand.

Three months earlier Jack would have roared with laughter at Tom's mishap; today Jack was politeness itself,

and not even the sight of that abject posy did more than make his lip quiver. Jack had had the infernal impudence to behave with magnanimity. He had said that since misfortune had overtaken Tom he should not present his own bouquet. This was precisely what Tom had been about to demand as his due, under the terms of their agreement. He said so, hating Jack for his punctiliousness. So Jack smiled in a slighting way, and had more than hinted that only a cork-brained fellow like Tom would have thought of offering pink roses to a goddess whose hair was a glorious Titian red.

Tom had brooded over it all the afternoon, but it was not then that the thought of calling Jack out had even remotely occurred to him. It hadn't really occurred to him when, on arriving at Treen Hall that evening, he had seen Marianne, adorable in a cloud of jonquil gauze over a white satin robe, holding in one gloved hand a posy of yellow roses. If any reasoned thought found room in his brain, it was merely a vague resolve to give Jack a leveller at the first convenient opportunity – if (for Jack was a clever boxer) Jack did not first plant him a heavy facer.

It was a very grand party, with several London swells, who were staying at Treen Hall, much in evidence. At any other time, Tom, aspiring to fashion, would have taken careful note of the folds of the neckcloth worn by the Tulip talking to Mrs Treen, or regarded with envy the cut of the coat moulded across the shoulders of the gentleman from London who was dancing with Marianne. He would not have been jealous of this personage, for all his handsome face, and exquisite bearing, for he was quite old – thirty at least, Tom judged – and probably already the father of a hopeful family.

All his jealousy, all his seething rancour, was reserved for Jack, his closest friend. Mr Treen's excellent champagne did nothing to assuage it. Before an hour had elapsed it must have been a very obtuse person who failed to realize that the two handsome boys from the Manor and Melbury Court were itching to be at one another's throats.

And then Jack, stepping back politely for an elderly gentleman to pass him, trod on Tom's toes, and made him spill his champagne.

2

Somehow they were confronting one another in the small saloon that led out of the ballroom, and Tom was cursing Jack, and Jack, instead of punching him in the ribs, or meekly apologizing for his clumsiness, was standing straight and stiff, white-faced and close-lipped, his pleasant grey eyes as cold and as hard as the granite of the country. Then Tom had uttered the words from which there could be no retreat. 'I shall send my friends to wait on yours!' he said, in a grand way that was only marred by his shaking voice of fury.

Dear, good Harry Denver, who had seen the encounter, and had followed the injured parties into the saloon, tried to make peace, urging them not to be gudgeons, to remember where they were.

'Harry, will you act for me?' demanded Tom.

Poor Harry stuttered and floundered. 'Now, Tom, you know this is the outside of enough! Jack meant no harm! Jack, for God's sake – !'

'I am perfectly ready to meet Mr Crawley, when and where he pleases!' replied Jack, in a chill, brittle voice.

'Be good enough to name your friends, Mr Frith!' said Tom, not to be outdone in formality.

'Jack, you're not three parts foxed!' Harry said urgently. 'Don't be such a damned fool, man!'

Then he saw that they were no longer alone. The gentleman from London, who had been waltzing with Marianne, had come into the saloon, and closed the door behind him. All three young men glared at him, the hostility of the native towards the stranger patent in their eyes.

‘You must forgive me!’ he said affably. ‘An affair of honour, ...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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