



# **The Count's Last Mistress**

*Bess Greenfield*

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When her social conscience and avant-garde art trigger rumors of mental instability, New York heiress Jeanne Delancy flees to Paris to begin her life anew as an independent painter. But the political turmoil of 1871 leaves her with an abandoned child to protect and a tragic mystery to solve. Struggling and desperate, Jeanne is stunned to receive an absurdly lucrative commission from a handsome, aristocratic cavalry officer. The former wallflower has every reason to mistrust the arrogant, yet charming comte de Chaumenay, but she finds the offer difficult to refuse and her new patron even harder to resist.

Consumed with remorse over his past, war hero Olivier Valencourt is certain the beguiling American beauty he discovers in a Montmartre hovel holds the key to his redemption. To convince her to reveal a truth only she can tell, he plots to win her confidence through patronage, patience, and his never-before-tested powers of persuasion. But it doesn't take long for the bohemian's unconventional wisdom and innocent sensuality to obliterate his self-control and divert his agenda entirely. While the strong-willed opposites struggle to reconcile their deepest longings, dangerous alliances and scandalous secrets threaten a tragic repetition of history.

## **The Count's Last Mistress Details**

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Author : Bess Greenfield

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# From Reader Review The Count's Last Mistress for online ebook

## Rebecca Graf says

Picture

It's the early twentieth century. France is torn up after war with Austria. Jeanne Henri finds herself taking care of her friend's child after the woman disappears. She will raise him until she returns and keep him from his cad of a father while keeping their heads above water from the commissions she receives on her art. When the child's uncle walks into her life, she finds everything turned upside down. Jeanne will lose the child and her heart.

I have to say that this is a truly delightful read. The story is wonderfully constructed with various sections from either the viewpoint of Jeanne or of Olivier, the new count. I love getting into the heads of the main characters instead of being restricted to just one. The story moves from Paris to the countryside and back to Paris. The reader is given insight into the various levels of society from those at the lowest levels all the way up to the elite who want for nothing.

The detail of the historical aspects was impressive. The author writes in extreme detail that I felt myself in sitting in the low-repute tavern watching the various customers and their interactions. The detail wasn't too much where I was bored and began to skip sections. They were weaved in throughout the story in a very expert way.

There are some pretty steamy scenes between Jeanne and Olivier. They were extremely romantic yet expect detail. Also, skipping them would not help you in the story. These are important as it shows much about each character and are the catalyst for their relationship.

If you like historical fiction especially romance, I highly suggest you take a look at this book. I will be looking for more from this author.

Note: I received this book from participating in a virtual book tour with no expectation of a positive review.

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## Kari Kaz says

The story opens in *Paris 1871*. The city has been devastated by war and living conditions are unstable at best. We meet Jeanne Henri, an American heiress who is hiding in Paris. She is living in squalor, working as a painter and taking care of her friend's son, Alex. Her friend Claudine has disappeared and left her in Alex's care. Jeanne is working to make ends meet and befriends the artistic set in Paris.

Until one day Olivier Valencourt, the Count of Chaumenay, knocks on her door. Olivier has a message for Claudine from his dead brother Étienne (Alex's father). He discovers that he has a young nephew even though Jeanne keeps this information from him. They are both attracted to each other, but there is a huge wall of mistrust between them. Olivier convinces Jeanne to travel to the countryside and take on a job helping to decorate his mansion there. She accepts, and they travel with Alex, her good friend Sylvie, and Sylvie's young son.

The story moves on from there and basically *narrates a beautiful love story between two people who were seemingly not meant to be together* . The characters grow, develop, yearn, and love. And the author takes us on a wondrous journey with them so we feel their passion and crave their HEA as a mystery is solved along the way. Jeanne is a courageous, independent and idealistic spirit. Olivier is temperamental and stubborn, and makes a grave mistake where Jeanne is concerned. At times it seemed a lot of the problems could've been resolved with a simple conversation. However, given their personalities and obstinacy, their actions and discussions made sense. The ending was bit rushed, but we get a great epilogue.

The first thing that caught my attention when I started reading this book was the author's remarkable skill to convey precise details without bogging us down with information. I could hear the horses clomping down the street, smell the city's decay and the countryside's freshness, and perfectly visualize the children riding a sled. This extended to her portrayal of characters and settings in general, from the hero and heroine to the secondary players. I was there at all times and *the story just flowed and captured my attention* .

*ARC received from Bess Greenfield in exchange for an honest review*

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## **Janette says**

This review can also be found at [www.3chicksafterdark.com](http://www.3chicksafterdark.com).

The Count's Last Mistress was a refreshing change of pace for me and my historical-loving ways. It takes place in 19th century France just after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War rather than the typical Regency England or Scottish Highlands. The change of scenery took a little getting used to, but I loved all the Parisian landmarks and familiarizing myself with different geography. Aside from that it seems the Ton and the French aristocracy really aren't so different.

Jeanne Delancy is an independent painter who finds herself in France after fleeing America and her step-mother's threat to institutionalize her for her avant-garde works. She's barely getting by when she takes on guardianship of a friend's young son after her friend disappears. I admired Jeanne's confidence and strength in pursuing her career despite the social views toward working women at that time. She's loyal and devoted to her new charge, Alex, and I found myself easily relating to her character. She's not your typical wilting female but one who can hold her own. It's a good thing, too, because society can be so unkind.

Jeanne's life becomes a little more complicated - okay maybe a lot - when Olivier Valencourt enters the picture. Olivier is haunted by the loss of his late brother and is determined to do all he can to honor his memory, including delivering a final letter to the woman he loved, Alex's mother. When he arrives at her address and finds Jeanne in her place, neither is sure exactly how the other is part of this grand scheme. Greenfield masterfully plays out the interaction between the two to maximum humor and tension. The attraction between them is obvious, but they're cautious and unsure how to proceed. In order to gain the upper hand, Olivier offers Jeanne a commission she can hardly refuse.

If I could find one thing that stumped me through this book it was trying to discern the true nature of Olivier. He seemed to be a kind, compassionate guy until something didn't go his way. When that happened he would become cold, calculating and almost indifferent. I couldn't tell if it was simply a defense mechanism or if his character was truly prone to extremes. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, I attributed it to being stubborn and a little self-centered. So many times he was tender and warm toward Jeanne, so I'd like to believe his

feelings were genuine. If not, it would've changed quite a bit of how I felt as the relationship builds between them throughout the book.

I loved that there were so many different plots and points interwoven into the fabric of this story: Alex's paternity, Jeanne's career, Olivier's family and title, not to mention the romance between Olivier and Jeanne. Greenfield does a fantastic job of keeping you guessing throughout; there were times when I felt a particular storyline had been resolved only to have it flipped upside down in a way that changed everything. Integral pieces of information or events were skillfully withheld until precisely the right moment in order to maximize their impact. It might sound strange, but I'm always fond of authors who give me characters I love to hate. In this case it's Noëlle Jacquin - that woman is evil with a capital E! She's driven by her own selfish agenda and she carries off villainous with quite a flair. I can only imagine that she's going to eventually be the master of her own demise.

Bess Greenfield is a new author for me, and I'm always ecstatic to find writers I really enjoy. You can bet I'll be checking out what else she's written and following her works in the future.

RATING: SNEAKERS

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### **Debbie McCreary says**

War Hero Olivier Valencourt has returned home to take his dead brothers place as the comte de Chaumenay. He has found a letter that his brother wrote to his lover, Claudine. Now he is on his way to deliver the letter and finds Jeanne Henri, with a boy that is imagine of Olivier's brother. Unbeknown to him, Jeanne is really a New York Heiress Jeanne Delancy, fleeing New York and now her only interest is taking care of the boy and to paint. She is strong-willed and wise, and hiding secrets besides who the boy belongs to. Oliver commissions Jeanne to come to his home to paint. This starts the story of Oliver and Jeanne fighting against their growing feelings for each other and the secrets each hold. I liked this book, it was well written and involved many interesting characters before all things worked out. I would suggest this book to be read by any person that enjoys light-hearted romance with a thread of secrets to be unfolded.

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### **Jayne dArcy says**

I enjoyed this story very much... however, there were more than a few times when I wanted to slap either Jeanne or Olivier because there were so many incidents of simple miscommunication between them. However this did take place in the late 19th century in France and the men, especially of nobility, were controlling of their women. Jeanne, though, comes from America and women are already asserting their independence.

When Jeanne and Olivier finally are on the same page it feels as though Jeanne is a little too quick to forgive Olivier's most recent faux pas.

The writing is very well done, and definitely enjoyable. I was impressed to see that not only was Jeanne of an independent nature, but she has her friend who grows into a strong woman. And, Olivier learns that there

is more to his sister than shopping.

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## Jenny Q says

I was drawn to this story first and foremost for the setting. It's different--Paris--and even better, this is a time in France's history that I know very little about. And I was intrigued by the characters: a French nobleman soldier and an American artist. That combination had the potential for some serious fireworks and an unconventional love story, and *The Count's Last Mistress* did not disappoint! Our story begins as Olivier Valencourt, recently returned from war, arrives at a rundown Parisian boardinghouse attempting to fulfill his brother's dying wish: that he deliver a letter to his former mistress, Claudine Ardaut. Instead, he finds an intriguing American claiming she's never heard of Claudine, pretending to be French and pretending to be the mother of a little boy that looks exactly like his brother. While he would like nothing more than to complete his mission and get back to living his life, he owes it to his brother to discover what happened to his lost love and to take care of his nephew, and if he happens to break through the American siren's defenses in the process to get to know the real woman, so much the better.

But his arrival sends Jeanne Henri into a panic. Her roommate, Claudine, has not been seen in weeks, and Jeanne knows she never would have willingly left her son behind. Rumors of insurrection and a government crackdown abound, and Claudine was a known Commune supporter. But she can't tell any of this to the handsome officer looking for her, whom she mistakenly assumes is Claudine's former lover. Claudine's heart never recovered from his betrayal, and she won't betray Claudine by allowing him into her son's life. But she can't go on as she has been either. Times are tough for a struggling artist, especially for one hiding from an ugly past, attempting to raise her friend's son as her own. As she embarks on a dangerous mission to finally uncover the truth of Claudine's disappearance, the time has come for her to admit she needs some help, but can she trust Olivier with the secrets of her life . . . and of her heart? And will they find Claudine before it's too late?

The first thing that struck me about *The Count's Last Mistress* was Bess Greenfield's writing. It's very exciting to find a debut author with such talent not only for crafting a story but for telling it so beautifully. The second thing was the description. This book practically oozes atmosphere. I was fascinated by this foray into the artistic underworld of Paris. The sights, sounds, and scents come to life! From smoky cabarets to grand salons and the rubble leftover from the Commune's revolution; from artists arguing their craft with glasses of absinthe and cigarettes, to studios with scantily clad models and cafes bursting with life and laughter, it's a total immersive experience into the underworld of the Parisian art scene.

And finally, the characterization is fantastic. How refreshing to find an independent woman (easy for Jeanne in this case because it's Paris and she's American) struggling to get by on her own merits. Jeanne is intelligent, talented, and feisty, and she also has a big heart that tends to hold her back as she takes on the troubles of so many others as her own. She's a true artist, and it was such fun to read this story through her artistic eyes. Olivier is everything one would expect a French military hero to be. Dashing, handsome, and sophisticated but with a layer of guilt and that sense of having seen too much that war tends to inflict on its survivors. He does act like a right prick at times, but his background and social standing is such that the reader can understand why he acts the way he does in certain instances. I thought he was pretty realistically portrayed, and a very nuanced and dimensional hero. And so very French! He does redeem himself in the end and proves himself to be a worthy companion for our Jeanne. There's a good cast of supporting characters too, and I'm hoping to see Jeanne's friend, Sylvie, and Oliver's sister, Henriette, in future novels.

One thing I did miss and would have liked to see was a little more background info on the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune to help me better understand the historical significance and what the Commune revolutionaries were fighting for. For as our story takes place, they have not given up entirely, though they have been driven underground and now fight furtively, setting fires and causing mayhem when they can. It's an important backdrop to the story, especially given the disappearance of Claudine and her rumored clandestine activities.

But overall, I was thoroughly impressed with this debut. The setting, description, characterization, emotional angst, and rich storytelling all add up for one sublimely satisfying read. I couldn't put it down. *The Count's Last Mistress* is a true standout in a sea of Regency and Victorian romances, and I am anxiously awaiting Miss Greenfield's next novel!

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### **dakotapie says**

There were some problems with this one that an editor with a deft eye could probably fix, but an editor can't make a story intriguing if the idea, characters, and plot isn't already with the author. I enjoyed the characters in this one, and the historical setting. It's a departure from what I usually read - and maybe that's why I liked it so much - but it's definitely an historical romance I'd recommend. (Note: the author gave me a copy of this book to review. However, I would have gladly paid for this read given how well I enjoyed it.)

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### **Linda Hays-Gibbs says**

Title: The Count's Last Mistress

Author: Bess Greenfield

Review Rating: Five +Stars

Reviewer: Linda Hays-Gibbs

Genre: Historical Romantic Fantasy in Paris 1871

Passionate Sparks: an Endearing Romantic Jaunt

Olivier Valencourt, the conte de Chaumenay has a letter to deliver to his dead brother's lover. He is grieving and in pain from war injuries. The problem is he finds another woman living in her house raising the son of his brother, Etienne and his lover, Claudine Ardaunt. He is convinced she is a madwoman. She does nothing but lie to him.

Jeanne Delancy is using the name Jeanne Henri. She is such a close friend to Claudine that she entrusted her with the care of her young son Alex. Claudine's lover, Etienne broke her heart when he left her. She thinks this man is Claudine's lover because his name is Valencourt. She tells the stranger that Alex is her son and sends him away but she is worried he can see the boy is his because he looks so much like him. Olivier decides to follow her to see if she will lead him to Claudine. She is so beautiful that he can't control his thoughts and finds he is worried she is a low woman. He decides he needs to get Alex away from poverty and this horrible woman that frequents bars drawing pictures. She is poor and evidently selling her favors, which he would love to sample himself. He also sees he needs to ease the boy away from her gently.

Olivier makes a plan to offer her employment as an artist to decorate his home. He must also see where their attraction leads. He convinces her that she can't turn down the money.

Then he convinces her to bring Alex, her friend, Sylvie Barnett and her son Leo to chaperone and keep his lusts under control.

The trip is a great adventure for the boys and Jeanne can't refuse the money because they were hungry. She finds that she is attracted to this rich aristocrat but she is an American hiding from her parents. They thought her crazy and wanted to institutionalize her. She is very afraid.

She must keep Alex safe for Claudine's return. She still pretends to be Alex's mom so Olivier can't take him away from her care. She realizes he knows he has a better claim on the boy. She remains completely loyal to her friend throughout.

Her poverty is so evident when she sees where Olivier lives that she realizes Alex might be better off with his own family, even though she loves the boy more than she cares to admit. She realizes Claudine might be dead. Alex has become her family and loves her too but misses his mom.

This is such a sweet story of love and the personalities of these characters develop before your eyes. They become real to you and you do not want the story to end. They have flaws and fears but they overcome so much in a very turbulent time in France.

I will not give any more of the story away but there is so much more. The supporting characters grow too so there are several stories within the story. I was amazed and hope there is another to follow this one soon.

I gave the story Five Plus because it captivated me from the first page. The love scenes are so passionate and real. I also liked the fact that the hero was such a manly man. His story was just as tragic as Jeanne's but they outgrew the depression and despair to find their hopes and dreams. Great job Bess Greenfield for a story worth reading.

Linda Hays-Gibbs

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## **ROMANTIC HISTORICAL REVIEW BLOG says**

Review by: Jenny Q

Review Rating: 4.5 Stars

Link to Review: <http://www.romantichistoricalreviews....>

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### **Loretta says**

any mistakes on here is because I cant get the capitals to come up on my tablet. ..sorry.

first time I have read any of bess' s books...and what a good book, really enjoyed it. It was romantic and so gripping at the end it kept me clued to the pages couldnt wait till I got to the end. definitely worth a read and had my kind of ending, really looking forward to reading more .

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### **Lynelle Clark says**

A lovely Historical Romance with an intriguing plot that keeps you glued to the pages till the very end. The story plays off in France after the Revolution and its citizens had to make away for themselves with what ever was at hand. Women could now venture out and make money of their own, being more independent than what was used too. Some people especially the rich did not adapt to this new changes, considered them far better than the rest of their fellow citizens.

The dramatic changes are masterly written into the characters personas to give you a good idea of what life had to be after the revolt. The difficulties that these women faced and the hypocriticies surrounding this.



Today as women we think it is our right to live independent, earn our own money and follow a successful career. But this was not always the case and the author did write a wonderful plot line placing the emphasis on the new culture that we take for granted.

Each woman in this book had to deal with a new life, doing the best they can to put food on the table, each one chose a different route. You learn about their daily struggles and how they became stronger with each passing day.

You learn of some men that tries to manipulate them in doing their own bidding, using them and threw them away at the end when they were not useful anymore. With much heartfelt and compassion the author draws you into their lives giving you a believable story you can identify with.

Jeanne Henri Delancy disappear from her country after a tragic accident and landed in Paris. The land for artists and new thinkers. As an artist herself she struggles to keep it together. Trying the best she can to be a provider for Alex a young boy that was left behind after his mother has disappeared without trace and an idea who the father is but not willing to look for him.

Olivier Vanlencourt, injured in the battle, lost his brother during the war and blamed himself for his death. Realizing that he had to look for the lost boy and bring him back to his family estate where he belongs.

When these two meet the story became very interesting, with many secrets and lies between them and a lot of desire to boot these two struggled to find a middle ground concerning Alex.

Family members that tries to separate the two lovers because they new the best for each but later do change their minds about the other. A jealous woman who can not accept that Olivier was not interested and a delusional artist who thought Jeanne was his property.

With twists and turns through out the story line the book entertain you as the reader. Learning about all the artists and the composers from that time and the obstacles they faced.

A book I can recommend to all historical readers that loves to indulge in a good book.

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## **Nicole Laverdure says**

The perfect gentleman!

I love the feeling of being captivated by a good book, and *The Count's Last Mistress*, written by Bess Greenfield, was perfect for me! It's a wonderful historical romance set in Paris 1871. I am so glad that this new-to-me author, decided to send me her book to review, because I found it refreshing! I loved her hero Olivier and heroine Jeanne, also her secondary characters Alex, Leo and Sylvie. The intrigue was well developed, a real page turner. The story begins as a New York heiress Jeanne Delancy, flees to Paris to forget her past and start a new life as an independent artist painter. Enters count Olivier Valencourt in her life by a strange coincidence, while searching for another woman! He needs to find the truth about something that happened in this family and will try to manipulate Jeanne to share her secret. But, a beautiful attraction will emerge between Jeanne and Olivier. Will their love be possible? It's is also a story that describes the misery and suffering that people experienced after the war and revolution. Ms. Greenfield really wrote a beautiful love story with charming characters! I strongly recommend her book, if you want a refreshing historical romance.

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## **Lori McD says**

A Good Read.... review to follow soon.

*Received the book from the author, Bess Greenfield, in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Natalie Ryabenko says**

I enjoyed this book. It tells the story of two people who meet and slowly fall in love, but they fight their attraction.

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### **Dbr says**

What a fun read! I am not an avid romance reader and was expecting something fairly predictable, but Greenfield surprised me with all her twists and turns, especially how she used a post-revolutionary France to weave her complex storyline. Jeanne is wonderfully fallible, human, and relatable to me. Her insistence on making her own way, devotion to her art and career, and refusal to conform to expectations of the period make her a refreshing romance heroine and even reminiscent of Jo from Little Women, which was a childhood favorite. Olivier reminds me nothing of Teddy, though; he is strong, valiant, and passionate. The characters' chemistry is palpable and provoked some very quick page-turning as their relationship heats up. As a mother, I thought the presence of children - and their honest portrayal as mess-makers and question-askers - was an interesting touch. Instead of taking away from the romance, as kids sometimes do in our own lives, they make the relationship of Jeanne and Olivier all the more relatable and inspiring. With its mix of history, love, and intrigue, Greenfield may have turned me on to this genre after all!

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