



The Dark Affair

Maire Claremont

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The Dark Affair Maire Claremont

The Victorian era was full of majestic beauty and scandalous secrets—a time when corsets were the least of a woman's restrictions, and men could kill or be killed in the name of honor.....

Lady Margaret Cassidy left a life of nobility behind in Ireland, forsaking her grieving homeland to aid war-ravaged men in England. Still, she never expected a cruel turn of fate to lock her into an unwanted betrothal with one of her English patients—much less one as broken and dangerous as Viscount Powers.

Wrecked by his tragic past, Powers' opiate-addled sanity hangs precariously in the balance, leaving him poised to destroy anyone who dares to utter the names of the wife and child he still so deeply mourns. So when he is forced to marry Margaret in exchange for freedom, he is shocked by the desire to earn her trust, her body, and—most alarming of all—her heart....

The Dark Affair Details

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From Reader Review The Dark Affair for online ebook

Ash says

3.25 stars

♥Rachel♥ says

I don't pick up historical romances very often but every time I do I enjoy them. **The Dark Affair** was no exception. As a romance set in Victorian England it was a moving story of love and redemption.

Viscount James Powers has descended down a destructive path over the overwhelming guilt of losing his wife and young daughter. He blanked out the pain by visiting opium dens, getting addicted to the point that he no longer cares about anything, least of all appearances. His father, the Earl of Carlyle has other ideas because he needs a sane heir to the title, and so he commits James to a psychiatric asylum. Desperate to get him back to normal, but knowing the danger of him slipping back into his addiction, the Earl arranges for Lady Margaret, a nurse and aid to soldiers ravaged by war, to help him. More than that, the Earl wants Margaret to marry James to ensure his lasting recovery. Being that Margaret hails from Ireland, even if she is nobility shows just how desperate the Earl is. Insanity right?

That's what Lady Margaret thinks, but a sudden change in her circumstances makes this deal impossible to refuse. That and the fact that she genuinely wants to help James, because something in this man speaks to her very soul. Margaret knows it won't be easy to get him back on track, but her heart goes out to James in his state, no matter that he's an arrogant arse when they first meet.

I was rooting for James and Margaret to find happiness together right away. I was a little worried that James' love for his dead wife would mean that Margaret would always come in second, but as details of his past marriage were revealed those worries flew out the window. James is pretty much taken with Margaret from the get go. I loved that even in his miserable withdrawals James is immediately drawn to Margaret and her feisty ways. She helps get James to wake up and realize that his problems are not the only ones existing in the world. Margaret opens James up to see that he is not alone in his suffering, and helping others helps heal his own past pain. For the first time, thanks to Margaret, he's hopeful about the future. James can't help but fall head over heels for this beautiful, headstrong, smart woman:

...nothing could compare with the terrifying way Margaret made him feel, as though he might conquer worlds but could lose it all at any moment. Never in his life had he felt more exposed yet at one with any human as he had last night.

Margaret has her own demons that make her afraid to let James in, but I loved that she opened up anyhow and dealt with her desires honestly and in an adult manner. She was inexperienced but not embarrassed to admit it, and ask for what she wanted. Something that James was oh-so-willing to accommodate. Oh my! In the end these two prove to be a perfect match of hearts, and I was thrilled at how things wrapped up.

I was impressed with The Dark Affair. Maire Claremont's beautiful writing and sweeping romance is sure to please any romance junkie!

Mandi Schreiner says

Margaret Cassidy left Ireland to come to England and help those who have come home from war. She is a nurse that helps them rebuild their lives by getting them off of an addiction to opium. She has become known for it and can pass by with the money she makes off of it but she needs more. Her brother is in financial and personal trouble so when the Earl of Carlyle asks Margaret to cure his son of his opium addiction, she accepts.

Viscount James Powers, more known as just Powers, started opium as a way to forget the horrible memories surrounding the death of his wife and young daughter. His father is desperate for Powers to end this addiction and not only asks Margaret to use her expertise for this matter, but to also marry him. He doesn't want his son heading down a dark path later in life, and the Earl is frail of health and won't always be there to keep an eye on him. Margaret would not only be his wife, but his keeper.

The Dark Affair has a really strong start. When we first meet Powers, he is chained up in an asylum, out of his mind with his addiction. He is surly, and sick, almost brutal in his behavior. With the impending marriage of convenience, I became very excited. Margaret married to this broken, tortured man excited me greatly. Even with just a brief glimpse at Margaret I knew I would like her. She is strong, able to roll her eyes at Powers's behavior and truly wants to see him get better. I even believed in her reasons for wanting to marry Powers – as she is very close with her brother and as you will find out, needs all the help she can get, and with Powers's fortune, that would be possible.

While I overall liked this book, it really stalls in the middle. Once Powers gets control of his withdrawal symptoms, his grief over his dead wife and child is very heavy. Every little thing reminds him of them and he can't move past. I feel like for a good part of this book we just sit and watch him suffer. I needed something else to happen in this story to keep my interest. I appreciate how the author lets these two come to know each other and we have a lot of time spent with Powers understanding Margaret's passion of helping those starving in Ireland. But it wasn't enough to keep me interested.

While I believe the two of these would become good friends, I'm not sure I was fully convinced they fell in love. I like that it was a slow moving situation, because Powers needed to heal – but I needed more time with them before the 'I love you' made sense to me.

This is the first I've read of this author but I'd like to try her again.

Rating: C+

Shauni says

Originally Reviewed For: Bodice Rippers, Femme Fatales and Fantasy

The Dark Affair is Maire Claremont's third book in her Mad Passions Series and once again she takes us down a dark alley on a fog filled night. Showing us the edgier side of Victorian England. Ms. Claremont

doesn't offer us rainbows and unicorns, she doesn't give us light hearted comic romance no what she does is show us how love can flourish in the most unusual and undesirable circumstances. That even those who have given up can have a life and more importantly, love.

Into the abyss once more.. Ms. Claremont understands the human heart. But more than that she understands the dark and dangerous desires that live within so many of us. The desire to be perfect, the desire to indulge, the desire of excess and the very darkest desire..the desire to escape.

Lady Margaret Cassidy had seen true suffering. Raised as nobility as her country slowly starved to death. She watched her parents wither away in despair as they tried everything to help. She watched her brother turn from a happy, sweet loving child into a militant who would do anything to free Ireland from English tyranny. She fled Ireland and became a nurse... working among the war torn in Crimea but now she has finally found a path that offers hope. She works with those lost to addictions. She helps them fight their way free. A Series of successes has brought her to the attention of some very powerful people and she is offered the task of helping Viscount Powers escape his self made hell. Only she has to marry him first. Appalled and proud Margaret declines until her own responsibilities force her to accept. Of course marriage is one thing but love? Can that ever come?

Viscount Powers has given up. Losing his wife and daughter totally destroys him. He was supposed to lead a charmed life, instead he leads an isolated existence of drugs and debauchery. Waking up chained in a mad house forces him to realize that soon enough he will be dead. He has one last chance, marry Margaret and rejoin the living.

Powerful and intense. This book was an emotional ringer. Living through addiction is hard and Maire didn't sugarcoat it. It was painful and messy. It was a triumph of hope. Powers had to accept his wife and daughter's death. But first he had to relive it. I admit it, I cried...buckets.

This was gothic romance at it's best! Sure there were no wives locked in the attic but then again Powers was locked in his own form of an attic. But Maggie had her own demons to chase and her desire to help her brother made me shed more than a tear or two.

This is a must read series!

Shauni

Caz says

The hero of this, the third book in the author's *Mad Passions* series made a really strong impression in me in the previous book *Lady in Red*, in which he appeared as the best friend of its hero, the Duke of Farleigh. James Stanhope, Viscount Powers is an incredibly charismatic man with a very caustic manner, who, despite being full of self-loathing is somehow ridiculously sexy; and he helped the heroine to battle her addiction to opium even though he was well on the way to becoming an addict himself.

Powers began using the drug after the deaths of his wife and their young daughter some years earlier, but in the year that has elapsed between the ending of **Lady in Red** and this book, he has become entirely dependent on it and is on a path to certain self-destruction. His father, the Earl of Carlyle, has, in desperation, had Powers committed to an asylum – not because he wants him locked up, but because he doesn't know how else to prevent his son killing himself.

Lady Margaret Cassidy served as a nurse in the Crimea and has spent years helping men injured, both physically and mentally, by war. Her reputation for successful treatments and outcomes leads the Earl to engage her to help his son, and the book opens on the first meeting between Margaret and James, who wants nothing to do with her. But the earl is desperate – Powers is his only son and the only heir to the title, and he needs him to get well, so he proposes an unorthodox bargain to Margaret. If she will marry James and provide the much needed heir in addition to acting as his nurse, the earl will settle enough money on her to enable her to help her younger brother, who has got himself mixed up in some serious trouble, and to send money home to help her people in Ireland, who are still suffering the ravages wrought by the Famine.

Margaret doesn't like the idea at all, but the thought of being able to help her brother and so many other people outweighs the distaste she feels at the idea of being bought and her worry over the stirrings of attraction she feels for the badly damaged viscount. James is naturally not wild about the idea either, but realises it's pretty much his last chance and so the wedding takes place just a couple of days later.

I enjoyed **The Dark Affair** more than **Lady in Red** partly because James' recovery is handled in a manner that felt much more realistic to me than did Mary's in the earlier book. It seems to happen fairly quickly again, but then I suppose there is a limit to the time an author can spend having a character going through withdrawal symptoms without boring her audience. But at least in this book there *are* withdrawal symptoms – nasty ones – and we see James enduring them, and then later having to face up to the cravings he knows he will always have.

The focus of the story really is on his recovery, which means that the romance is perhaps a little sidelined, but on the whole, I didn't mind that because Powers is such a fascinating character. He and Margaret strike sparks off each other right from their first meeting, and I enjoyed their verbal sparring and the way that Margaret won't let James off the hook, challenging him at every turn. It's not that she doesn't have any sympathy for him, but she won't allow him to wallow; she shows him repeatedly that he doesn't have a monopoly on suffering, and that happiness can be found by even the poorest people in the meanest circumstances. For his part, James does genuinely want to get better, and as he does, he comes to see that Margaret has demons of her own that need conquering.

The other aspect of the story I really enjoyed was watching the reconciliation between Powers and his father. The pair has long been estranged, and at the beginning of the book, it seems that Carlyle's desire for his son to regain his health is motivated more by his concern that he has an heir worthy to inherit his wealth and title than any concern for James the man. But that perception changes gradually over the course of the story, and I found the later scenes between the two quite touching.

On the downside, there's a sub-plot concerning Margaret's younger brother and his involvement with a group of Irish revolutionaries that is never fully developed and which is wrapped up a little too neatly. And there were times in the middle of the book when I felt that James was still so mired in his grief and guilt that I couldn't quite believe that he was ready to fall in love with someone else. Once the truth about the tragedy is revealed, the romance becomes more convincing, but I did feel that perhaps the balance between the two – James' suffering on the one hand, and his growing love for Margaret on the other – wasn't quite right.

The writing is generally good, although there are a few odd turns of phrase and word choices that jar a little, but I enjoyed the book overall and appreciate Ms Claremont's desire to write stories that are less fluffy and a bit harder-hitting than normally found in historical romance. I don't think she's quite found the right balance yet, but the books in this trilogy have been interesting and well-written enough to have kept me reading them in spite of their flaws.

Adria (Musings and Reviews) says

Originally posted on Adria's Romance Reviews.

There's a touch of madness in author Maire Claremont's characters that make her stories so addictive!

After reading *Lady in Red*, I couldn't wait to see what Claremont had in store for the tragic and broken Viscount Powers. He seemed like such a lost cause at the end of the second book that I didn't know if there was any salvation for him. He's so far gone in the beginning of *The Dark Affair* that he makes underdogs look like an alpha dogs, but I think that's what made James Stanhope such an amazing character.

As a reader I saw him emotionally destroyed and physically drained. He had pretty much given up on life as he knew it and was rotting away in an asylum. He was addicted to morphine and near permanent madness, it can't get much worse than that. There's little about James that isn't revealed in the beginning of the book except for how his wife and daughter died and why he mourns them as if he was responsible for their deaths, yet I still found him to be such a powerful and interesting character. Surprisingly, as dangerous as James appears to be, his salvation comes in the form of his main caretaker, a mysterious woman named Margaret.

I could go on and on about how lovely Margaret looks but it was her extensive knowledge about addiction and her bravery that really hooked me. At the time *The Dark Affair* takes place, it's clear that not much was known about opium addiction so having Margaret actually know about the withdrawal symptoms made her a much more interesting character than most heroines and justified her hasty marriage to James.

The Dark Affair turns into a battle of wills as both James and Margaret set out to prove that they don't need each other but as they try to prove just that, they inadvertently become closer and learn about forgiveness, starting over and love.

With Maire's books, the happy ending isn't reached without blood, sweat and tears and her characters really have to work to get to the point where they can look back and say "It was all worth it." That to me makes for a very exciting and passionate book. Yes, this is a fictional romance story but there's a lot of reality in it too. The author doesn't gloss over the more prominent facts of life back in Victorian England, those facts become realistic and unpredictable obstacles for James and Margaret to overcome. Character growth is not a problem in this book, or even the series, as James and Margaret grow in leaps and bounds.

A very impressive start for the two characters, and a rough, bumpy path to recover and love. While James and Margaret are attracted to each other, their relationship (and marriage) isn't consummated until much later but I found that this left more time and room for them to learn about each other and how to trust one another without sex clouding the issue.

Final Verdict: *The Dark Affair* is a deliciously dark, sensual story that had me awake until the early morning hours and at the end, made me crave more from an author who is fast becoming one of my favorites!

Diane K. Peterson says

I enjoyed this third installment in the Mad Passions series. Claremont intrigued us with the Powers, the hero, in the last book so I was anxiously waiting for this one. It was a satisfying story dealing with difficult emotional issues. Perhaps the issues were resolved a little too quickly, but there is a limit to how long readers want to wait for a resolution. Nice writing and good depth of characterization make this a very good read.

Jess says

Review posted: Happily Ever After - Reads

Blog rating: B-

Margaret meets Viscount Powers when he's locked up for being unstable and hooked on opium. She's been asked by James's father to see if she can help his son. She's been known to have helped men in the past get beyond the demons that they would deal with through drink and drugs and she's been successful in turning around their lives. After agreeing to help James, their first meeting doesn't go all that well. But with her brother in trouble, wanted for murder in Ireland, she needs money and James's father's help which he offers her in exchange for not only helping James, but for marrying him and producing an heir. At first Margaret refuses, rightfully so(!), but when she learns about how much trouble her brother is in, her only surviving family member, she'll do whatever it takes to help save him, including marrying a man she hardly knows.

Powers doesn't want to be married, that's putting it mildly, but he wants his freedom back and agrees to a marriage in name only because as much as he hates to admit it, if he wants to beat his addiction, he's going to need Margaret's help. James has a lot of grief to deal with, he's never come to terms with the deaths of his wife and young daughter and it's eating him up inside and destroying his relationship with his father. With Margaret's help, he starts to heal, he finds common ground with his father and he starts to have feelings for Margaret that he never experienced with his wife.

Both Margaret and James go through the emotional wringer. For Margaret, she's seen the horrible suffering of her people in Ireland before she left for London, including that of her parents and she's had the weight of the world on her shoulders for so long. Her life for so long has revolved around helping others that she's never taken care of herself or her wants. She refuses to crack and let her shield down so when James is opening up and baring his soul to her, when he needs her to do it in return, she just can't. It takes a long time and a tragedy for her to finally open up and let everything out and only because James is there to catch her.

James's story is what I was most taken with. He has so much guilt and pain over losing his daughter. His marriage wasn't necessarily a healthy one, his wife had issues that made her mentally check out and after having their daughter, she slipped farther into a depression and her actions were devastating. It's heartbreaking to see this man still so broken, blaming himself, blaming his father, doing everything but actually dealing with his feelings. He became an addict and it's only with Margaret's help that he starts to turn around. She gets under his skin and I loved the scenes he had not only with her but especially his scenes with his father. His journey is a tough one, but the healing begins when he starts to deal with the pain instead of ignoring it.

If there was one weak element, it was the romance. I just found myself wanting more. They have some sweet scenes together, Margaret is a virgin and their first time together was fitting in how it played out for both

James and Margaret. But so much focus was on James and his recovery (which I loved don't get me wrong) but the romance suffered a little for it.

There is a side plot involving Margaret's brother and a pack of men he aligns himself who have extreme plans of action they want to take in London. I could have taken or left this whole side story because I just wanted to get back to James and Margaret when the story shifted to her brother. His story ultimately serves an important purpose in Margaret's life, but I still wasn't caught up in that part of the book.

I'm a big fan of Maire Claremont's Mad Passions series and The Dark Affair is an enjoyable read. I can't say it's my favorite in the series but James will pull at your heart strings and his journey alone makes the story well worth a read.

Dorine says

Recommended Read! Also posted at TBR Mountain Range.

From the depths of addiction rises a gripping historical love affair that will move you to tears before renewing your soul.

Having read LADY IN RED, book two in the MAD PASSIONS series by Máire Claremont, I was most anxious for Viscount Powers' story. THE DARK AFFAIR captivated beyond my expectations and to my surprise, Powers' heroine is a perfect, fearless Irishwoman who will face and then overcome his nightmares. She added to the appeal of this novel and increased my fascination with Powers.

After the death of his wife and daughter, Lord James Stanhope, Viscount Powers, began to use opium to ease his memories and his pain. Addiction eventually forces his father to commit James to an asylum in hope of curing his son of what will surely kill him. No one seems to be able to reach him until James meets the lady who will become his savior, if he's willing to let her.

Lady Margaret Cassidy makes a deal with a devil, or so it seems. In order to save her Irish people and her errant brother, Margaret promises to heal the son of the Earl of Carlyle. She has agreed to marry this earl's son and whatever else the earl demands, in exchange for the funds needed to save her brother from himself, as well as the people her family failed during the famine. At first the idea seems like a perfect plan, but will the deal be kept if she doesn't succeed?

Margaret tests James' patience at every turn, using her quick wit to tongue-tie the man who is so very used to getting his way. Her Irish stubbornness serves her well by not allowing James to bully her into submission. She's determined to save him from himself no matter how many times he tests her fortitude. Can she remember that he's her patient and avoid falling in love with the man she was forced to marry?

THE DARK AFFAIR appeals to the reader's hidden fears and emotions, touching on soul-deep sadness before renewing with hope. Author Máire Claremont is a wonder to behold in her technique, creating a beautiful, dark romance with such care for detail. Page after page while following James' addiction seems like only moments, yet, it's like you've known him for years as the depth of his sorrow and guilt is laid out before the reader to experience, right along with Margaret.

James is a powerful character who vividly portrays the madness of addiction. Margaret's empathy, due to her

experience with her patients facing the same after the war, is both maddening and welcome for James. Eventually, he senses the deep-seated passion and pain within Margaret that she has denied. All her efforts have been focused on helping others, while rejecting her own needs. As this couple works through their individual vulnerabilities, their ultimate healing is well-earned and absorbing.

The highest compliment I can give an author is to buy their books after I've read them for free for review. Máire Claremont's books go everywhere with me on my kindle as well as reside on my keeper shelves as advanced copies. I've already reread a large portion of this book before writing my review. See if it speaks to you in the same way – I feel that its darkness is also its light – completely captivating.

Gut-wrenching, soul-stirring passion is THE DARK AFFAIR'S reign in glory. A Romance Junkies Recommended Read for all those who appreciate redeemable flawed characters.

Reviewed by Dorine, courtesy of Romance Junkies.

Jennifer says

The Dark Affair is the third full length novel in the "Mad Passions" series. While a stand alone, I think the reader will benefit from having read at least the second book where our hero Powers is heavily featured. And unlike the other books where it was the heroine escaping an asylum and/or opium use, this time it's Powers.

We found him in an asylum, he's heavily dependent on opium and is only semi lucid. He's caretaker Margaret is trying to wean him off. But she's not there out of the goodness of her heart at first. His father has paid her to take care of him and in return will give her money. She'll use that money to help her brother and his efforts for the Irish cause. She's of Irish nobility. Her brother is an earl, but her father moved them into more "humble" conditions to fight for the Irish cause against the English.

To be honest I've read a lot about English history, but I've never focused on Irish history so I didn't know a lot about this particular stage in their independence movement or their suffering. But it's grim. Like most of Claremont's novels, there's a very dark tone to her characters and to the world at large.

Initially Margaret believes she'll help Powers fight his addiction and that'll be all. But when her father asks (or pleas if you will) to marry him so that he'll full time care, she rebukes. She constantly thinks this would never happen to a male caretaker. The fact that she's been asked to help means that no other male physician has been successful in treating Powers. But when her brother flees Ireland because there's a price on his head Margaret knows there's only one way to save him. This causes strife among the siblings because her brother hates everything the English nobility stand for and has seen first hand the ill they have done to their people. But Margaret reasons with her new found money and power as a viscountess she'll be able to do more good that way then through violence and bloodshed.

Margaret is a very strong character, she's willing to break with her brother even though it pains her because of their differences in activism. She's treated people afflicted with addiction, she's seen death, hunger, and poverty. She takes a peaceful approach to it, so when her brother sides with the Fenians and accidentally sides with the extreme side to them - it's a very interesting contrast.

And Powers himself. He's such a strong and proud man. He says he "laughs in the face of assistance" and it

shows. He's the heir apparent to the earldom so he's been self-sufficient and catered to all his life. Addiction? It's something he can shake off or so he believes. Margaret fully knows the withdrawal symptoms of addiction and how a person needs to be weaned off of it. It's amazing how his father doesn't believe her treatment could work when she's been able to successfully help people. During the wedding, Powers starts to hallucinate because of the withdrawal and Margaret injects him with a small dosage of morphine to the horror of his father. Claremont paints an interesting picture of how the peerage views addiction and the treatment of it. Again, there's that power play of a woman treating a man. Just how efficient can she be?

A lot of the premise is Margaret treating Powers and him coming to terms with his addiction and loss of his family. But it's about two people who need each other to heal. While Margaret is helping to treat his addiction- the emotional and physical side to it- Powers realizes there's more to his wife than meets the eye. He wants to see past the shell she's created. What exactly is she hiding? And what can he do to help her?

You get the sense of bleakness and despair. When Powers is stubborn and doesn't want to be seen in his most ugliest moments you see through him. You see the vulnerability that he's trying to hide for pride's sake. And Margaret, bless her, she's willing to help him at first because of duty, but then slowly because of love.

The only thing however, I felt the ending was rushed. We get a lot of Powers' recovery and her slowly opening to him. But then around the 90% mark is the conflict between the two and the resolution with her brother. It felt too quick. I did however, love the scene between Powers, his father and Margaret in the morning room. That was such a powerful scene.

Usually there's some introduction to the next featured character, I wonder who/what the next book will be about.

Mary - Buried Under Romance says

I had the pleasure of receiving an ARC from the author, and this has indeed been a pleasure to read. Fantastic story with two characters tormented by guilt, the past, and immense responsibilities.

Review to come. This is a definite 5 stars. ^_^

WhiskeyintheJar/Kyrarkyker says

The author seemed to find her footing in this third installment of the series. Our hero's battle with opiates was flushed out more (still not quite fully) and the relationship between the hero and heroine had deeper meaning, too. The Irish plight and the issue with the heroine's brother was pushed to the side and rushed at the end but this book had an overall completeness feel that I found lacking in the others.

I'm completely on board with this author's writing style, the dark/gothic setting ambiance and the emotionally in the trenches characters she creates. I hope to see more from her.

Claire says

So crazy bad. The characters make no sense - motivation or reasoning wise. Feels like this was written in a single weekend and never edited.

The Romance Evangelist says

4.5 stars.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher for an honest review at Seductive Musings.

This review contains spoilers for *THE LADY IN RED*, book 2 in the Mad Passions series. You could try to read *THE DARK AFFAIR* as a stand-alone book, but I wouldn't recommend it.

When I read *THE LADY IN RED* last fall, Maire Claremont was a new author for me, and I hadn't known what to expect. Its whirlwind plot and profound emotions were almost too much for me to handle (but in a good way). I actually had to force myself to put it down more than a few times, because I was so worried about what would happen to not only its hero and heroine, but the hero's friend Viscount Powers, whose help was essential in their plan to save the heroine from her villainous father.

Powers - a tortured and brooding man who refused to answer to any other name - shared the same brutal need for opiates that plagued the heroine of *THE LADY IN RED*. While her addiction had been induced during her forced captivity in a madhouse, his was entirely self-inflicted after the untimely death of his wife and child. By the end of the previous book, the heroine and hero are both safe and happy in marriage together, but meanwhile Powers has given himself over entirely to his addiction. Months later, when we first see him in *THE DARK AFFAIR*, he has himself been involuntarily committed to a madhouse.

Margaret Cassidy was a titled lady back in Ireland, but that couldn't protect her from the harsh realities of famine and poverty, nor from the ongoing violence as those who starved fought back against the cruelty of their English overlords. Her gift for healing has brought her to England, where she is tasked by the Earl of Carlyle to bring his son Powers back from the brink of insanity. Back when Margaret was still in Ireland and her father was still alive, Powers had sent a letter and funds to assist those in dire need of help, asking for nothing in return. Rescuing him now from his addiction is her opportunity to repay that act of kindness, even as her attachment to him quickly moves in a more personal direction. It will take all of Margaret's talents and indomitable will to bring Powers back not only to sanity, but to a life where he can grieve properly for what he's lost without sacrificing himself again. But when the violence she left behind in Ireland comes to call at her front door, what ends up being at stake isn't just their shared happiness, but their very lives.

Once again, Maire Claremont has written a story that transported me into a world more darkly intense than most historical romances, with characters I couldn't help but root for as they were forced to trust in each other even as they should rightfully be mortal enemies. The depth of Powers's sorrow had only been hinted at in the previous book, but here it is front and center with everything you might expect, and worse. He has abused his mind and body for so long in self-imposed guilt for the death of his wife and child that his recovery is never really certain, even as the story moves toward that conclusion. And when we find out just how they died...well, it's definitely understandable why he has suffered so greatly, even though it's just as obvious to us, if not to him, that their deaths should not be on his head.

It's also clear that only someone like Margaret would even have a chance to break through the wall of anger and opiates that Powers has built all around him, and not just because of her beauty and determination. Only Margaret has the ability to focus his attention beyond his own pain and outside the bubble of privilege in which he has lived his whole life as a member of the English nobility. But it will take more than that for them to move forward with a life together, and their Happily Ever After will be won only after those who seek to defeat them are confronted one last time.

I'm sad to see the Mad Passions series come to an end but I'm looking forward to seeing what Maire Claremont comes up with next. *THE LADY IN RED* vaulted her into my list of favorite historical romance writers, and now *THE DARK AFFAIR* has firmly established her place near the very top.

Ratings:

Overall: 4.5 stars

Sensuality level: 3.5

Sharyn says

This is the 3rd book in the Mad Passions series and is about Viscount Powers (James) who was featured in the second half of *The Lady in Red* (Book #2) as an opium addict. In *The Dark Affair*, James has been drawn further into the depths of opiates and drink, so much that his father has committed him to an asylum. His father has also found him a new nurse, a female one this time, after so many other male practitioners failed to last very long with the acerbic Viscount Powers.

Margaret Cassidy knows she can help James, as she has had success treating other men who were addicts. However, she acknowledges, that while she has never felt any desire for any of her other patients, she is finding it hard to keep that distance with James. To make things worse, James' father not only wants Margaret to cure James, he wants her to watch over him for the rest of his life... as James' wife. Normally, Margaret would instantly say no to this but she is desperate to help her people back home in Ireland and her brother has taken up with some dangerous Irish rebels. Being a Viscountess with wealth and power might be just the thing she needs to survive and help her brother. But will she be able to keep this a nurse/patient relationship, as she wishes it to remain?

I really liked this book as it was very fast-paced and kept me engaged the whole time. James and Maggie clash and argue, yet there is desire simmering below the surface the whole time. I also liked how it wasn't just about James and how he needs to come to terms with what caused him to be an addict in the first place, but also about Maggie and why she feels the need to distance herself from everyone.
