



## The Duchess of Drury Lane

*Freda Lightfoot*

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## **The Duchess of Drury Lane** Freda Lightfoot

Passion, jealousy, scandal and betrayal – a true-life Regency Romance of the rise and fall of an extraordinary woman born into extraordinary times. Growing up in a poverty-stricken, fatherless household, Dorothy Jordan overcame her humble beginnings to become the most famous comic actress of her day. It was while performing on Drury Lane that Dorothy caught the eye of the Duke of Clarence, later to become King William IV. Her twenty-year relationship with the Duke was one of great happiness and domesticity, producing ten children. But ultimately, Dorothy's generous nature was her undoing and she was to be cruelly betrayed by the man she loved.

## **The Duchess of Drury Lane Details**

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Author : Freda Lightfoot

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## From Reader Review The Duchess of Drury Lane for online ebook

### Denise says

Before reading this book, I knew very little about Dorothy Jordan. She was a very interesting person! I thought this was a good read, my only complaint is that the Duke of Clarence (future King William III) didn't make an appearance until halfway through.

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### Jane Eyre says

Interesting historical fiction on the life of King William's mistress.

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### Deyara says

Meh. Dora is hard to like, and the story was boring. Didn't enjoy the style, though the setting was nice. 2.5 stars.

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### Kay says

A enthralling narrative that brings history to life. Dora, a talented woman of her day and a loving mother, experienced the inequalities of the social system when the men in her life refused to marry her. The fact that one of these men was the future king of England emphasised the unfairness of life.

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### Orsolya says

The same way that modern-day rock stars prefer to date models and actresses date athletes; attractions occurred between English royalty and theatre actresses. Frieda Lightfoot tells the tale of Dora Jordan: a comedienne actress whom became the mistress of the Duke of Clarence (later King William IV) in "The Duchess of Drury Lane"

"The Duchess of Drury Lane" is penned in a memoir-like narrative with Dora recalling her life story to a reporter in a first-person dialogue. This results in a colorful and illustrative narrative which comes alive on some levels. However, Dora isn't as accessible as one would prefer, as although she describes her life; she doesn't truly reveal her psyche or emotions/thoughts leaving a filter between herself and the reader.

For those readers who are fans of Nell Gwynne (the mistress of King Charles II); "The Duchess of Drury Lane" highly resembles and is in the style of HF novels surrounding Nell (in fact, Nell is even mentioned within the story). Although this familiarity can be appealing; to some readers it can feel like 'stealing' Nell's personality.

Some further frustration occurs with Dora's absence of emotion and over-simplification of monumental events (i.e. "I found I was pregnant again. My mother died. Moving on") which leaves unanswered questions

and further inhibits connecting with her character. Lightfoot also allows Dora to be a complainer such as bickering that she keeps becoming pregnant and giving birth to bastard children but yet continuing to sleep with the father of the children (shut your legs, Dora!). Lightfoot also unattractively depicts Dora as an ego-maniac, constantly mentioning how loved she is, how many admirers she has, etc. Dora basically takes no responsibility for her actions and thinks everyone simply loves her.

The prose and language style within “The Duchess of Drury Lane” is beautiful grammatically but also easy-to-understand for the average reader. However, issues arise with inconsistency as the story is slow in some areas, then faster, then slow, etc. The pace is therefore jumpy and uneven. Sadly, Lightfoot spins ‘usual’ storytelling by focusing too much on menial events while barely grazing on those which beg for more attention. This hurries the plot and adds to a lack of deeper connection to characters.

On the positive side, despite the gaps in time and lack of details; “The Duchess of Drury Lane” offers a level of surprise and unpredictability in the plot which encourages page turning. Also appealing is the fact that Lightfoot clearly performed a large amount of research concerning the theatre-world of the era and presents it in a vibrant, compelling, and insightful way.

Don’t expect to personally get to know the Duke of Clarence (King William IV) as he is also portrayed flatly and exceedingly lovey-dovey to the point of unbelievability. Although, he *does* have some chemistry with Dora which adds to the strength of the plot.

The latter portion of “The Duchess of Drury Lane” is entirely too rushed and incorporates odd stylistics such as changing the narrator for a few pages which is not implored elsewhere in the novel. The conclusion is also abrupt and leaves the reader with some loose ends. However, Lightfoot attempts to answer some of these in the ‘Author’s Note’.

Although minor, a genealogical table would have been useful. Another complaint: Lightfoot has the tendency of choosing a word and using it several times (even on one page), as though she found a thesaurus and was determined to swap and use words. Although minor, it is slightly distracting. Also, it personally bothered me that the model on the cover has blatant acrylic nails with a French manicure making it look modern and costume-y. However, this is a flippant detail and naught to do with the actual novel.

Despite my complaints regarding the too-fast pace, lack of detail, and narration-style; “The Duchess of Drury Lane” is an enjoyable, quick read for those readers who seek a direct story stripped of details such as the color of curtains or characters’ deeper emotions. Lightfoot does successfully introduce Dora Jordan to audiences and promotes further research regarding her life. “The Duchess of Drury Lane” is a novel which is “hit-or miss” with readers and encourages one to read it for him/herself.

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## Becky says

I enjoyed reading The Duchess of Drury Lane. I liked that it was written in first person. This doesn't always work for me, but, in this case it did. Readers meet a young woman who becomes a famous actress on the stage. She was known by several different names in her life, and, I believe at least two or three different stage names. (The book jacket calls her 'Dorothy Jordan' but usually in the text she's Dora.) The first third of the book focuses on her life before discovery. To help her family earn enough money, she became an actress on the stage like her mother before her. She found she could do comedy quite well, and, her voice could charm audiences. Unfortunately, unwanted attention from her employer led to pregnancy. When her mother learned the truth, they fled the scene and started new lives elsewhere. Her debts to her old boss were

eventually paid, however, by a new employer. The rest of the novel focuses on her successes mostly on stage and her perhaps regrettable choices off stage. She fell for a man who promised marriage but didn't deliver, even after she gave birth to two children with him. Eventually, that relationship soured and she was persuaded to become the mistress of the Duke of Clarence. In all fairness, her relationship with William (William IV in later years) could not end with marriage. George III made it almost impossible for his brothers and sisters and sons and daughters to marry. The two lived as if they were married (without official sanction, of course) for almost two decades, I believe. She continued on stage for most of her life. Her income was too necessary for her family, for William and their children, for her children from previous relationships, for her own siblings. This book should prove interesting to anyone with an interest in the theatre during the Georgian era.

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### **Nadine Sutton says**

I liked it up to a point but it seemed like Dorothy Jordan was not that interesting? And Im sure she was more fun and lively...I have to say that it read more like one of Jean Plaidy's less successful offerings.

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### **Judith says**

Long and drawn out story.

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### **Peter Wilson says**

I was genuinely surprised that it proved to be a smashing read.

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### **Elizabeth says**

The Duchess of Drury Lane is the story of Dorothea Jordan, an Irish actress and courtesan who was the long time mistress and companion of the future King William IV of the United Kingdom, during the time period in which he was the Duke of Clarence. Dora was hailed as London's leading comic actress, particularly renowned for the "breeches" roles that showed off her celebrated legs.

In 1790 she met the Duke of Clarence. Despite the high-society scandal of their relationship, the actress and the Duke lived together for twenty contented years in which she bore him ten illegitimate children. She continued to act, often supporting the profligate Duke from her impressive income. Their life together ended cruelly in 1811 with the advent of the Regency and William's search for an official bride.

Dorothea's descendants today include many noble names and a prime minister (David Cameron!)

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### **Catherine says**

#### **Pleasant take on an interesting subject**

I'm a fan of Dora Jordan and enjoyed this fictional but accurate account, perhaps more happy than others I've read. The writing is simple which makes for a quick read.

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### **Barbara Bothwell says**

This novel about Mrs. Jordan, the long-term mistress of the Duke of Clarence ingeniously weaves fact with fiction. As very little is known about Dora Jordan's early life Lightfoot has created a plausible early story.

As a very successful actress Jordan earned enough money not just to support her family but also to pay for some of Clarence's extravagances. Her family consisted of sisters and brothers as well as her many children, most of whom were fathered by Clarence.

Jordan's life fell apart once Clarence became heir to George IV and it became necessary for him to produce a legitimate heir which meant marrying a suitable candidate. He subsequently became William IV and, ironically, Queen Adelaide was unable to produce children.

The Duchess of Drury Lane was what the 'press' of the time called Dora Jordan and, yes, the public could be vicious as well as adoring. Nothing changes!

This book is well researched and, as with all of Lightfoot's books, is eminently readable. I reckon she deserves a gold star.

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