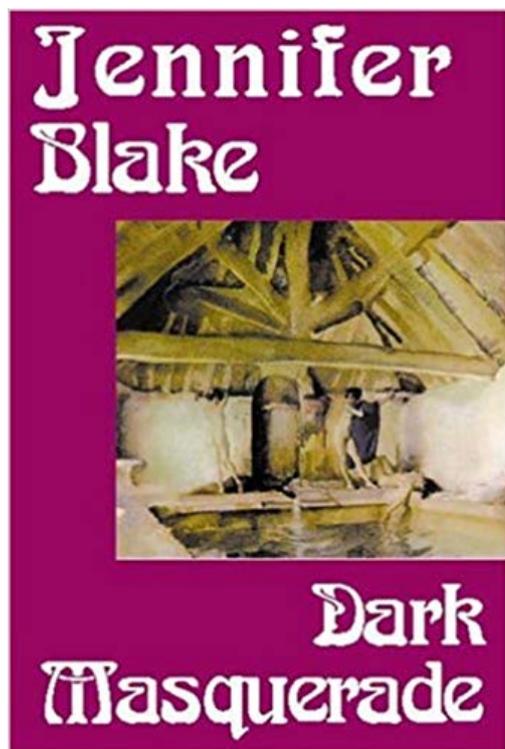


## Dark Masquerade *by* Jennifer Blake



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For the sake of her nephew, Elizabeth has assumed the identity of her dead sister Ellen Marie. She arrives at the grand Louisiana plantation of Ellen Marie's late husband, wearing the traditional black widow's weeds and carrying her infant nephew, Joseph. She is determined that the boy will reach maturity and inherit his rightful fortune. Luckily, the family at Oak Shade does not suspect that they are harboring an imposter in their midst. However, they are less than welcoming, treating her with frosty politeness. More disturbing are the unusual accidents that seem to be following in her wake, as if planned for her. And now, the dark creole Bernard Delacroix seems to be seeing through her assumed persona, right into her soul. What he also sees is that the "widow" is desperate for his attentions.



## Reviews of the **Dark Masquerade** *by* Jennifer Blake

### Onetarieva

Gothic novels can be a mixed-bag. They were mass-produced in the 70s and 80s, and many of them were bad. You really have to pick and choose to find a good one. DARK MASQUERADE is written by Patricia Maxwell, the pen name of bodice-ripper author Jennifer Blake, and I got it during a

promotion where most of her early books and some of her newer ones were free from the Kindle store. I forgot all about it until now, when I was combing through my Kindle to see what goodies were buried on there, and started reading on a whim.

DARK MASQUERADE ticks many of the usual boxes on the Gothic novel checklist. It has a young and resourceful heroine coming to a dark and unwelcoming mansion because of a tragedy. Nobody wants her there, and they aren't afraid to say so, either. The love interest may or may not be the villain. Someone tries to scare her away and, later on, kill her in order to accomplish some craven, dastardly purpose.

The novel is slow to start, beginning with Elizabeth coming to the Delacroix plantation in Louisiana, accompanied by her black servant, Callie, and her baby nephew, Joseph. We learn that the baby's mother, Elizabeth's sister, died in childbirth, and the father died in the Civil War. Before he did, though, he provided for his wife and child, and Elizabeth has decided to take on her sister's identity to ensure that the baby receives his inheritance.

The Delacroix make it clear that Elizabeth's presence as Ellen Marie is being tolerated solely because of the child, the late Felix Delacroix's sole heir. There's an additional black mark against Elizabeth because Felix ditched his childhood betrothed, Celestine, in order to elope with Ellen Marie. If you think that maybe Celestine isn't the kind of woman to hold a grudge, think again. The matriarch, Grand'mere, is slightly more welcoming, but she leaves most of the major household matters to her grandson, Bernard, who is clearly suspicious of Elizabeth, and reluctant to give up Joseph's money.

The atmosphere in this book is incredible. The descriptions of the mansion and the bayou are beautiful and I could easily picture the swamps, the gardens, and the furnishings. The family drama was exceptional, too. Far too often, the characters in Gothic novel are reduced to cardboard cut-outs. I read a book recently, also from the 70s as it happens, called MISTRESS OF THE MOOR, and the bad guy in that book attempts to scare the heroine by cutting up her childhood teddy bear and spelling out her name with the fluff on her bedroom wall. In this book, the scare tactics are far more sinister, involving deadly spiders, poison, fire, and various attempts at assassination and subterfuge.

I also really liked Elizabeth. She was resourceful and clever, but also mostly kind. When she did lash out, I couldn't blame her, because it was usually in response to some Delacroix bullsh\*t.

Also, Maxwell/Blake has an incredible vocabulary. Here are some of the words I learned in this book: epergne • cabriole • brocatelle • nankeen • demitasse • fainéant • tignon

Anyone looking for a good Gothic novel should pick up DARK MASQUERADE. As of my writing this, it's only 99-cents from the Kindle store!

4 out of 5 stars!

#### **Pedora**

This is a good romantic suspense written by Jennifer Blake. She is a good writer and I always enjoy her books. The editing could have been better though as I found quite a few errors in the book.

#### **Mr Freeman**

I have enjoyed every book I have ever read by Ms. Blake and this one is no exception. Elizabeth assumed her dead sister's identity to secure her nephew's future. Fearful of getting caught at any moment, she is faced with distrust, dislike and disgust by the family that should have embraced their fallen hero's widow.

#### **Alianyau**

It's hot in the Bayou of Louisiana when lies, death and deceit come to stay. With no home and no options where can a young desperate "Widow" go?

### **Kelell**

After the death of her sister and brother in law, Elizabeth feels it is her responsibility to make sure her baby nephew is cared for and receives his inheritance. Afraid that as only his aunt the family will take him away from her, she pretends to be her sister. She takes baby Joseph to her brother in laws family and moves in with them. The large family is a bit strange, and soon enough someone is trying to kill Elizabeth. But who? And why?

This story was just OK. It wasn't Gothic enough for me. A true Gothic story should give me goosebumps, but this story did not do that. And the romance in this book didn't happen til the final pages. All of a sudden the hero is in love with her, but with no explanation as to how it happened.

Overall, a bit boring. OK for free, but I wouldn't pay for it.

### **Xtreem**

Really not up to Jennifer Blake's other novels. Boring plot. Not a romance at all but some sort of pseudo crime story.

### **Lbe**

It was good but too short

I hoping this was an early book of hers. It definitely wasn't as good as her "Masters at Arms" series. It was a bit slow, but I did want to see how it turned out. Would an Aunt's love for her nephew be enough to help him survive his father's family?

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