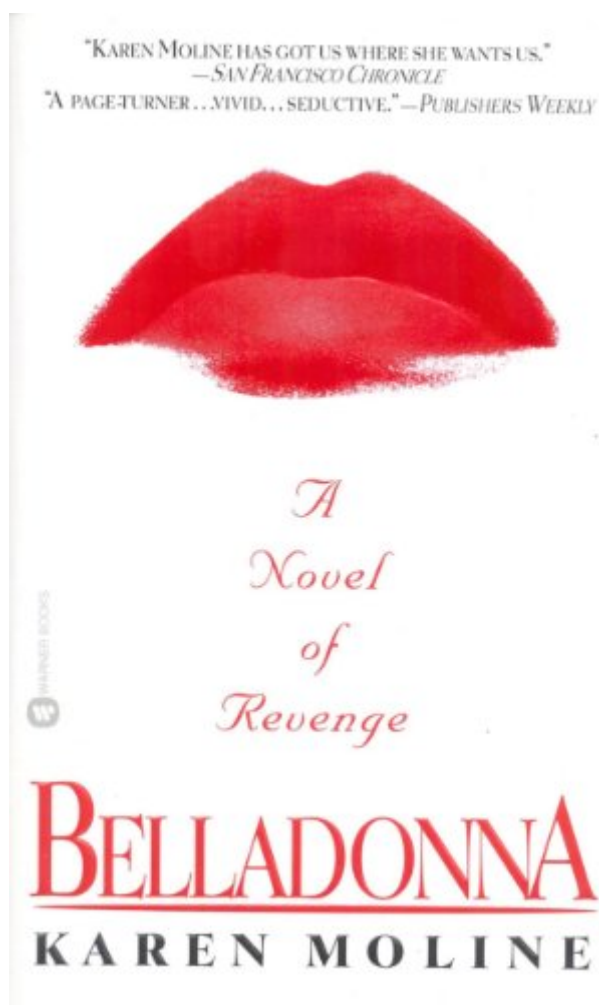


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# Belladonna



## Synopsis

Who is Belladonna? In New York City, she's known only as the mysterious masked woman who presides over the most exclusive, opulent club of the times. In Virginia's blue-blood countryside, she's known as the Contessa, the elusive heiress who flaunts convention and shuns human contact. But then there are a wretched few who remember her from "The Club" and knew her as a fresh-faced innocent whom they desired...and misled...and left to the sadistic devices of a nobleman who robbed her of her youth, her dignity, and, ultimately her heart. As Belladonna's story, told by one of her faithful manservants, slowly unfolds, we learn the horrifying truth behind Belladonna's masks and her insatiable desire for vengeance. It is a truth that involves betrayal, murder, depravity -- a truth so chilling that it will pit brother against brother, father against son, and will force Belladonna to ultimately confront the one man who can ultimately either destroy her, or set her free.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

BELLADONNA I admit, I picked up this novel for the sex. I expected a light but juicy story about glamorous people and their hidden lives. What I found was much more compelling, much more provocative -- just more. Belladonna has been promoted as "A Novel of Revenge." A beautiful and

innocent young American woman is kidnapped by powerful European aristocrats, then held as a helpless sex slave. Later, she gets them back, and then some. All true, but it doesn't begin to cover the depth of Karen Moline's characters, or the bitter truth in their responses to whatever life throws at them. Instead of going for cliches, she goes for gritty reality, every time. Nothing on the dust jacket mentions the rich thematic layers she weaves into a hypnotic cloth: the power dynamic that operates under the surface of all relationships; or how imprisonment of the mind can be much stronger than any physical ties that bind. Heavy stuff, but Moline serves it up skillfully in a perfect literary soufflé. On a more tender note, she also explores how "family" is truly defined by unconditional acceptance and support, not by genetic connection. I love the way she takes a group of walking-wounded individuals and joins them together with more commitment to each other than you'd find in many birth families. This writer knows the meaning of style. Her narrator, Tomassino, doesn't just tell the story, he confides it to you with gossipy delight, as witty and entertaining as your favorite gay hair stylist. I actually heard the abridged book on audio tape, read by actor Tim Curry, before I read the novel.

Isabella Ariel Nickerson is kidnapped and auctioned for 1 million pounds in 1930s England. She finds herself the unwilling play thing of a club of men who get their kicks out of forcing sexual tortures on women. Isabella is actually purchased by a man she knows only as "His Lordship", a man she will dedicate the rest of her life to finding and destroying once she escapes her hell. The story is narrated by a man named Tomasino, one of the few men that Belladonna truly trusts (along with his twin Matteo). They were castrated in the war, and therefore, Belladonna doesn't see them as a threat. Belladonna finds herself the heir of a large fortune, and she dedicates her money and time to Club Belladonna, a popular club, where she hopes to lure one of the members into her club. One member is all it will take to find the rest. I went into this expecting that I wouldn't like it, and honestly, the very beginning, the chapter before the actual story of Belladonna begins, was quite dull. It had that same rambling, verbose, tedious style as *Middlesex* did in the beginning, which sort of throws me off for a second because I like to get immediately sucked into a book. After that first chapter though, I was thoroughly engrossed with Belladonna's story. Tomasino is a witty narrator. He loves to talk. He loves to gloat. He loves to be right. Honestly, I'm glad he was the one telling the story. It gives it a flair that I think would be missing if Belladonna, or even his brother Matteo, told the story. Belladonna's diary is also scattered throughout the book; the diary she kept while she was imprisoned. The diary format was an interesting one as well, as it was written in third person rather than first. I think the concept of revenge appealed to me, as it would many people.

I bought Belladonna in hardcover years ago, from the Barnes and Noble clearance rack. \$5.00 seemed a reasonable gamble on a novel - and author - I'd never heard of. I read it in one sitting, and have done so on several subsequent occasions. Each time, I derive the kind of trashy, incredulous pleasure I get when I see a Star or Life and Style magazine - a kind of "shaking my head wryly" amusement at the story, the characters, and their issues. I reread it again today. And finally, I decided to see if anyone else is bothered by the issues that bother me each time I pick up the book. While I haven't yet found anyone who published a review sharing my particular gripes (granted, I haven't read all of them), I know that some readers (like me!) go online to see if anyone shares their opinions. Perhaps someone will come across this review sometime and have the "aha!" moment I was looking for. Frankly, a competent editor should have picked up on the various issues of continuity on which Belladonna trips itself up; for example, Laura mentions that Leandro, in a letter to her, wrote that the household help referred to Belladonna as "la fata" when it was, memorably, the locals in the town of Saturnia who did that....or historical societal accuracy; the two old money Virginians (Shirley and Letitia, if I remember correctly - the book is not in front of me) who were sniping about the Contessa during the party at la Casa della Fenice discussing the price of the chandelier...old money Virginia would never, NEVER discuss money in any way, not even amongst themselves. Nothing could be more gauche. Sure, they might doubt whether Belladonna is actually a Contessa. But money would never be discussed. No way....

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