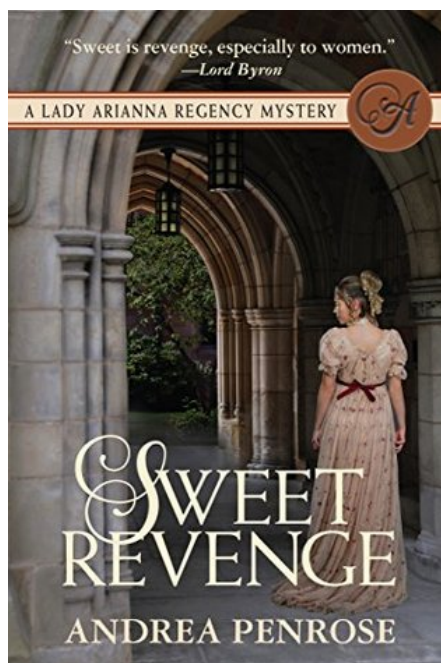




Sweet Revenge

Andrea Penrose

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England, 1813: Lady Arianna Hadley's desire to discover her father's murderer has found her acting the part of a French chef in one of London's aristocratic households. But when the Prince Regent is taken ill after consuming Arianna's special chocolate dessert, she finds herself at the center of a dangerous scandal.

Because of his expertise in chocolate, the Earl of Saybrook, Alessandro De Quincy, is the ideal candidate to investigate this crime. When the Earl's intuition leads to Arianna's exposure, she convinces Saybrook to keep her secret in exchange for help in tracking down the real culprit.

As their search takes them from the glittering ballrooms of Mayfair to the slums of St. Giles, it becomes clear that someone is looking to plunge England into chaos—and Arianna and Saybrook to the bottom of the Thames...

Sweet Revenge Details

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Author : Andrea Penrose

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From Reader Review Sweet Revenge for online ebook

Jaclyn says

Lady Arianna Hadley has been exiled in the Caribbean for years due to her father's disgrace. When he father is murdered Arianna vows to get revenge. Years later Arianna is finally in the position to exact her revenge and disguises herself as a male chef in an English household. However, when the Prince Regent falls ill after eating from her table, Arianna finds herself under suspicion, bringing her plans for revenge to a halt.

The half-Spanish Earl of Saybrook, Alessandro De Quincy, is called in to investigate the apparent poisoning by chocolate of the Prince Regent due to Saybrook's his eccentric interest in all things chocolate. Saybrook not only discovers that the accused chef is a woman, but also that she has a target on her back. These reluctant partners have to work together if they hope to discover who truly has it out for the Prince Regent, and it just might coincide with Arianna's revenge. *Sweet Revenge* was not as cozy as I was expecting it to be. When I first saw the cover I labeled this as your typical cozy mystery, it's mystery centers around food after all, how complex could it be? Quite complex as it turns out. I was quite surprised by the level of historical detail about both the time period and chocolate as a new substance for consumption in England. While all of these detail created an authentic mystery, I personally found that it came at the expense of fully developed characters.

The novel focuses mainly on the mystery element both Arianna's investigation into her father's murder and Saybrook's into the poisoning of the Prince Regent. At first the dynamic between Arianna and Saybrook was great. They were both interesting and enigmatic characters; I wanted to know more about both of them. The initial interactions between them were entertaining and fraught with tension:

"How do you intend to stop me? Chain me up in some remote castle dungeon like the dastardly Spanish villain in that silly horrid novel by Mrs. Radcliffe?" Actually, Arianna had found the book quite entertaining, but that was beside the point.

"Ye mean The Mysteries of Udolpho?" asked Henning helpfully.

"Yes, that's the one," she said.

"Montoni was Italian," murmured Saybrook.

"Mea culpa," retorted Arianna.

"And that is Latin," he pointed out.

"You," she said slowly, *"are an overeducated, aristocratic ass."*

Hemming stifled a snort.

"And you," countered Saybrook, *"are a bloody thorn in my lordly posterior"* (p. 166).

While the initial tension between the characters was good, it never really went anywhere. The romance or attraction between the characters came second to the mystery plot and because of that, I never really got the sense of a real relationship between the two. Now, you may say "But this is only the first book! Surely, this will change as the series progresses?". At this point, I have read all three books in the series and there is

never any real development in Arianna and Saybrook's relationship. Readers are simply told that a relationship has developed, but I never got any evidence of this. So, if you're going into this one intrigued by the romantic element to the books, expect a very toned down romance that is more "tell" than "show."

Another thing to note is that the author intersperses chocolate recipes at the beginning of each chapter in all three books of the series. While these recipes are tempting, I really felt that they serve to bring the reader out of the historical setting, at least, if you bother reading them (which I eventually stopped doing). The references to modern conveniences in the recipes served to jar the reader right out of the historical atmosphere that the author did such a good job of creating. Further, I didn't really feel that the recipes really added anything important to the story, they were simply a distraction for me.

While I like the historical setting of *Sweet Revenge* and the next two books in the series, I couldn't get past the rather flat characters. Further, I thought the mystery plot came at the expense of character development. Anything related to the characters seemed to be simply tossed into the book so that the plot could return to the mystery, which ultimately led to a disjointed reading experience.

Review originally published at The Book Adventures.

Luli says

You can find this review in English below.

Esta historia me ha estado incordiando desde la primera página, así que, antes que nada, notas aclaratorias sobre mi reseña:

-No me he terminado la historia, con lo cual mi opinión no va a ser completa.

-Bien puede ser que mi humor no fuese el adecuado, porque se me conoce por haber disfrutado de historias aún menos realistas.

Así que habrá que leer mi reseña con reservas.

Desde el momento en el que la autora nos presenta a Lady Arianna bajo la guisa de un cocinero francés con sobrepeso, bien *dotado* y todo el vello facial que se pueda imaginar, mi cabeza rechazó la idea y no hacía más que poner pegas a la credibilidad de la situación. Para más inri, se nos dice que dicho cocinero trabaja solo, rodeado de hornos y cacerolas y con apenas luz o ventilación para evitar ser reconocido...

Madre del amor hermoso, esa cocina sería lo más parecido al Sahara que puedo imaginar, igual es que el s. XIX no daban lipotimias...

Entra el héroe en escena, y tarda, exactamente, unos 5 min en *descubrir* la identidad de la protagonista. Otros 5 min en confiar en su inocencia y otros 5 en *adoptarla* y ser convencido de que ella lo puede ayudar a descubrir el misterio-asesinato sin desvelar demasiado sobre sus intenciones.

Y el golpe de gracia llega cuando ella, en su campaña personal para descubrir al asesino de su padre, se relaciona con los personajes más peligrosos de Londres, pertenecientes a un club sádico-secreto que se jacta de hacer todas las atrocidades de las que el ser humano es posible. Y déjenme decirles quién acompaña a la heroína a esa reunión sádico-secreta: ¡nadie! Va sola, porque ella es *smart-street*, tú sabes.

Y, adivinen qué hacen los personajes una vez que están todos reunidos... Pues algo bestialmente peligroso, arriesgado e ilegal: beber brandy y charlar...

¡Chicos malos!

En fin, que además de aburrida estaba encontrando la historia difícil de creer. La dejo aquí.

:(

This story has been bugging me from the first page, so, before anything else, explanatory notes about my review are due:

-I have not finished the story, so my opinion is not going to be complete.

-It could be that I was not in the right mood, because I'm known for having enjoyed even less realistic stories.

So my review should be read with a grain of salt.

From the moment the author presents Lady Arianna under the guise of an overweight, *well-endowed* French cook with all the facial hair you can imagine, my head rejected the idea and I couldn't stop finding faults to the credibility of the situation. To top it all, we are told that this cook works alone, surrounded by ovens and pans and with hardly any light or ventilation to avoid being recognized ...

My goodness, that kitchen would be as close to the Sahara as I can imagine, maybe it's just that in the 19th century people did not faint ...

Enters the hero, and it takes him about 5 minutes to *discover* the heroine's ruse. In another 5 minutes he trusts in her innocence and 5 more minutes later he *adopts* her and is convinced that she can help him discover the mystery-murder without revealing a thing about her plans.

And the coup de grace comes when she, in her personal campaign to discover her father's murderer, mixes with the most dangerous characters in London, they who belong to a secret-sadistic club which boasts of doing all the atrocities that the human being can possibly do. And let me tell you who's accompanying the heroine to that sadistic secret meeting: **Nobody!** She goes alone, because she's smart-street and all that, you know.

And guess what these sinister characters do once they are all together ... Well, something bestially dangerous, risky and illegal: drink brandy and talk...

Tsk, tsk, bad boys!

Anyway, besides being bored I was finding the story difficult to believe. I leave it here.

:(

SOS Aloha says

No chocolate lover can forget Forrest Gump's memorable observation at the bus stop, "Life is like a box of chocolates... you never know what you're gonna get." Gump's quote is an apt tag line for Andrea Penrose's debut mystery, *Sweet Revenge*, as it offers the wide variety of a Whitman's sampler – mystery, adventure, romance, history, humor, and chocolate recipes.

And like the unknown fillings underneath the chocolate shell, Andrea's characters reveal a certain sweetness of their personalities to which the reader can relate – an independent woman seeking revenge for a beloved father; a war hero whose aristocratic nature only hides his tender heart; and secondary players who add humor and suspense to the mystery plot.

Andrea Penrose draws upon the skills of her alter ego Cara Elliott to deliver the essential elements of the Regency era – the happy go lucky Prince Regent, the social climbing ton, and the glamour of London's ballrooms. Yet Andrea builds upon this Regency world to create an intriguing adventure through a murder mystery just as a master chocolatier would add fruit, nuts, and cream to an already delicious chocolate treat. Sweet Revenge is the start of a series so readers have the satisfaction of seeing Lady Arianna again along with the enticing chocolate recipes featured in the book.

In writing this review, I looked up another chocolate quotes. From Deanna Troi of Star Trek: The Next Generation, "I never met a chocolate I didn't like." I would say the same about any book from Andrea Pickens/Cara Elliott/Andrea Penrose – a satisfying surprise inside the perfected shell from the Regency World.

Ellie says

Pros

- Arianna had a strong personality (I find that readers are often told that a historical fiction hero[ine] is strong when they don't act that way)
- Quite a few of the standard regency novel tropes are avoided or subverted
- Chocolate appreciation.
- The mystery had intriguing elements, which I didn't guess

Cons

- Purple prose! Every dialogue was a witty repartee, and after awhile it became exhausting to read. You can have too much of a good thing. Real people don't always have time to come up with a clever answer, especially in the heat of an argument.
- ...Too much chocolate appreciation. I love chocolate but once again, **you can have too much of a good thing.**
- Although I like cooking, I found the recipes boring & not to my taste.
- Romance for the sake of romance, without much chemistry

I recommend *Sorcery & Cecelia: or The Enchanted Chocolate Pot (Cecelia and Kate #1)* by Patricia C. Wrede and Caroline Stevermer.

Sara says

I picked up this book after skimming the back cover...murder, mystery AND chocolate? sign me up!

Lady Arianna Hadley's had a rough life...traveling to the West Indies with her father after his "banishment" from England, she grew up with little money and then lost her father when he was murdered. She gets back to England with the determination to find the scoundrels behind her father's downfall and murder. Posing as a French chef, Arianna is staying "under the radar" until the Prince becomes ill while dining with his paramour Lady Spencer (interesting touch) and the chocolate dessert is the suspected culprit.

Enter Alessandro De Quincy, the Earl of Saybrook, chosen to investigate because of his knowledge of chocolate. It takes Saybrook little time to discover Arianna's subterfuge and soon approaching danger spurs him to get Arianna away from Lady Spencer's. The Earl devises a plan, giving Arianna a new identity

designed to get her into the inner circle of the Ton, where she encounters some of the men she holds responsible for her father's death.

There are many twists and turns in this story, and while Arianna and Alessandro are attracted to each other, the romance takes a back seat to the mystery. The final encounter will have you unable to stop reading until the final page. The characters are well-written and you can easily see the scenes in your mind's eye. A very well-done first installment...the teaser of book two promises another great story!

Allison says

This was a fun Regency historical mystery. Fairly predictable, I still really enjoyed it, and it was a quick read. This is one that I think Regency fans would enjoy, and it's a shame more of them don't know about it. There's not much romance so far, but it looks like that might change in the next book. The Regency flavor is there, though.

I have to say all of the chocolate descriptions and recipes made my mouth water, and may have influenced my rating. Yum. I'm off to eat some truffles.

Rane says

I was happily surprised how much I adore Lady Arianna's mystery, Sweet Revenge. With a mix of cozy and hard political mystery and a dash of romance, the book was a great mix that was hard to put down.

Unlike other cozies and mysteries it's told in third person then the more popular first person. This gives you a better understanding of all the players in the game. From the main characters Arianna and Saybrook to the villains.

I found the characters to very appealing almost at times putting the mystery to shame.

Arianna is out to get revenge for the death of her father, by the hands of his so-called friends. Hard-shelled and at times hard-headed, Arianna at times is a hard character to truly like due to her actions and keeping clues back from the case. Arianna grew up knowing and seeing others make pawns of people playing with their lives, and trust very hard to her, but Arianna has the grace to know when she's been acting dumb and childish and when to finally let the barriers down.

I loved Saybrook, a mix of gentleman and crafty fox. He holds to his own morals that are true and knows how to play the game without being an asshole but willing to get his hands dirty if need be. He tries to help Arianna out, and at times wants to lock her up and throw away the key just to keep her safe, he understands her way of thinking better than she does. He goes out to prove there are good people out to Arianna, and slowly breaks down the barriers that Arianna has around her, while having her drag him out of his own personal hell he put himself in.

Everything between them is a believable with a slow build in their relationship.

While the crime and mystery bring these two together, it's their love of cooking and chocolate that bind them even closer. Penrose added the cozy element at the beginning of each chapter with a delicious chocolate recipe and a little snippet from Saybrook's grandmother's diary. These sometimes have a small clue or a foreshadowing.

The rich history had me reading more of the financial swindle that played a big part of the story, the author did an amazing job of interweaving everything so nicely that the book was a perfect balance. Plus had my sweet tooth crying to try one or two of the recipes!

History, Mystery, Chocolate, and Romance Sweet Revenge had everything that made this a very sweet keeper.

Dodi says

Liked it a lot. Different from most historical romances I read. More mystery and intrigue than romance.

Kate says

Meh. I like historical mysteries, but while the research is clear in this one, there is also a messiness about how the characters think and act that made it not work for me.

Grace says

Maybe I'm not enough of a chocolate fan. In fact, I'm not much of a sweets person. I had a friend back in school though, who confessed that she buys pounds of chocolates every week and inhales them. So there are apparently people who are addicted to chocolate. If these people are looking for a chocolate cookbook that happens to also have a historical whodunit in it, they might enjoy this book.

The chocolate recipes and historical tidbits would perhaps have worked better if they were shorter and placed at the end of the chapter in ebook form. In paper form, the recipes would be great at the beginning and easy to find. In ebook format, it's tedious. But that's not the author's fault.

Maybe it was because all the characters seemed like caricatures. The book opens up with Ariana posing as Alphonse, but right from the beginning, her flashbacks in italics are incredibly frustrating and jarring. There are flashbacks regarding all sorts of people from her past, and something about the wording just made it terrible to pick out what was going on. Or it may have been the excessive historical prelude to every chapter seeming to derive from someone's diary that had me skimming.

Then there is the introduction of Grentham, the person in the government who's supposed to guard the Prince Regent, described as ruthless, but coming off more as a malicious head honcho who's constantly buffing his nails. He calls in Lord Saybrook, who's an Earl in his own right, but is so rude to him that I found it untenable. They banter (maliciously) about cooking, with Grentham finding it effeminate (but are not all great chefs at the time male?) and Saybrook stating that highborns on the Continent are more well-versed in household affairs. This conversation also has Grentham essentially asking Saybrook if he's gay, by asking if he likes boys or knitting (because that's also womanly). This conversation is RIDICULOUS to me. Homosexuality was, at the time, punishable by hanging, so for Grentham to accuse a Peer of this is simply incredible. And comparing cooking to knitting? What century are we in, now?

All the government officials are terrifically rude to Saybrook, who looks like a cadaver and is limping, due to soldiering, with veiled hints that a saber cut might have cut off his unmentionable. Again, also incredible,

because the man is an Earl. He goes over to Lady Spencer (Prince Regent's current mistress) and lo and behold, the butler is also rude to him and doesn't recognize him! How is this possible in all dictates of the Regency world as established by publishers and writers alike? They should have known he was Quality from the cut of his coat, etc. etc. Not to mention a newly ascended Earl who was limping -- there really wouldn't be that many in the top 1% of England who happened to also be in London.

Then there's a confrontation between Saybrook and Ariana, in her disguise as Alphonse, who's outed in a matter of minutes, and the only clue the reader has is that Saybrook has been staring at her fingers for a long time. The way he chooses to out her is -- he stabs her in the down-filled chest and then they engage in a...knife fight? The action isn't very clearly written. Then there's an explosion of some kind or a pistol shot, and people are in the small kitchen, and they're fending off two assailants in masks.

Yes, a cook is going to pad herself with down feathers and cook in a poorly lit, badly ventilated kitchen. Oh, not to mention, with a false moustache, and a cotton roll down her pants as well. How is she not to overheat and die while cooking?

There were just too many unbelievable elements, and the characters and the writing both were turnoffs.

Gail says

Interesting historical mystery. The heroine is bent on revenge, disguising herself as a male chef at the home of one of the Prince Regent's girlfriends. She serves some chocolate candies-- this is in the era when chocolate was first turned into something you ate, rather than drank. Prinny eats one and promptly keels over, poisoned. But nobody knows if it is actually poison, or if the solid chocolate is actually inherently poisonous. The chef is suspected. Enter the hero. He is a half-Spanish earl with a lot of knowledge about chocolate and also about investigation. He's the first one to figure out the chef is a female. There's a lot of combativeness between hero and heroine, both are holding back information. But they kinda like each other anyway. There are tricks played and bargains struck, and lots of actors working against each other, wheels within wheels, plots within plots. By the end of the story, you'll have learned a lot about the history of chocolate and financial chicanery. It's an entertaining story and I liked it quite a bit.

QNPoohBear says

This is a gritty mystery. Unlike most Regency set mysteries, it's a true crime mystery. The crime is of monumental proportions that could have worldwide consequences if allowed to continue. Ariana is not a sheltered young lady. She's had a tough life and she knows lots of dirty tricks, dirty words and isn't afraid to trade sexual favors with gentlemen if necessary. Though I like smart, strong heroines, Ariana is too tough for my tastes. She's very single-minded in her purpose and very bloodthirsty. She goes beyond the limits of what's considered proper behavior and gets involved in something very scary and nasty. At first I did not think Saybrook would be an appealing hero being drug addicted but he grew on me. Sandro is darkly mysterious and has a bad boy appeal. He's smart, dashing, reckless and caring all at the same time and who can't love a man who loves chocolate? The author's research is excellent and really shines through in the novel. The setting is well done and the mystery is specific to this period. Each chapter begins with trivia and a (modern) recipe for chocolate desserts which I really liked. I would have preferred period recipes in the text and modern ones at the end though. The author is certainly very knowledgeable about chocolate. The author doesn't write in a period voice and there are far too many slang words for male body parts on nearly every page. In spite of that, there are no love scenes or even any kisses. Though I enjoyed the chocolate trivia

and couldn't put the book down until the mystery was solved, I really didn't like this book. I didn't like the grittiness of the story. I think I'll stick to drawing room comedies and genteel mysteries.

April says

Really 3.5 stars. It would have been only three because the main kept holding back information for no good reason but she redeemed herself before long and the book ended well. I ended up really liking the characters after being very hesitant to do so for the first half of the book.

It was an intriguing mystery, all the chocolate information was definitely fascinating too. I doubt I'll use any of the recipes (though one is for my favorite cookie and I already use it) but quite a few sounded interesting.

For romance fans - the romance is barely there, just subtle hints.

People afraid of romance taking over stories, read the above line.

Cozy mystery fans - less zany than most contemporary cozies but not a thriller either. Though there are only bare hints of humor and this is a little darker in atmosphere than most cozies, it did remind me a little bit of Amelia Peabody, just a little and probably mostly because of the setting.

I will look in to reading others of this series.

Michelle says

This is the first book in the Lady Arianna regency mystery series. Arianna has disguised herself as a male chef in a London society household in order to find out who was responsible for killing her father while they were their exile from England in Caribbean so she can exact revenge. She is in trouble when the Prince Regent falls ill after eating her solid chocolate concoction, a novel concept at that time in England when chocolate was primarily a drink. Because of the need to keep the attack under wraps, a former military officer and expert on chocolate, the Earl of Saybrook is assigned to investigate. In interviewing Arianna, they are attacked and he discovers her secret. She agrees to help his investigation, going undercover as a distant female relation, in hopes of finding out her own mystery. The two are unsure if they can trust one another, but with the future of England possibly on the line, they must find a way to make it work. The story includes many historical details including a reference to an intricate economic scam of the times. The book includes a slew of chocolate recipes, one at the start of each chapter. While they looked delicious, the sheer number of them was a bit distracting from the story, particularly because of their modern format and descriptions.

Ariel says

Series: 1st in Lady Arianna Hadley Mystery

Sensuality: light romance, heavy innuendo and period cursing

Main Character: Lady Arianna Hadley, although a lady, her father was disgraced and died when she was 15 and she had to make her way alone and penniless in the world.

Setting: 1813,England

Obtained Through: from publisher for an honest review

Since her father was murdered when she was fifteen, Lady Arianna lived through hellish times to survive, with her driving goal to find her father's killer and make him pay pushing her on. Which is why she is disguised as a French chef in Lady Spencer's home gathering information for her revenge. Her plans are interrupted when somebody attempts to poison the Prince Regent using her chocolate desert. Somebody felt the chef was the easy target to set up for such a treasonous act and Lady Arianna is now under scrutiny.

Alessandro De Quincy, the Earl of Saybrook is enlisted by an underhanded government official to investigate in spite of his war injury to his leg. Nevertheless Saybrook had been in the intelligence branch during the war and is sharp and devious. He sees through Arianna's disguise, just in time to save her from a bullet. He decides that she can be of use in the investigation and they reluctantly join forces to determine who tried to kill the Prince and why.

While this had all the ingredients to have been a good regency romance, the author kept the romantic tension in the background and focused on making a suspenseful mystery which paid off exponentially. Arianna is a heroine that you route for immediately. She has been through the school of hard knocks and survived with vengeance driving her. She picked up many skills along the way including the use of disguise from a theater group and especially how to fight dirty to survive. She has hardened herself and believes that she has no heart anymore after the things she has had to do in life. Trust does not come easily at all, and she sure doesn't trust the aristocrat Saybrook, after all, it was an aristocrat that murdered her father.

Saybrook has never been the same since the war and his injury. The assignment tossed to him by the government is clearly to let him be the fall guy for any missteps in the investigation. Saybrook takes this new lease on life and is inspired to get to the truth and not be used as a convenient scapegoat. The Saybrook character is just complicated enough with glimpses of his personal pain yet fire for life.

The plot has plenty of twists and surprises making it suspenseful. Who killed Arianna's father is not who anybody expected and that goes for the person who made the attempt on the Prince's life. The motivation for all this becomes clear as the story plays out.

The climatic confrontation with the killer is a nail-biter and gets the blood pumping, so kudos there. I must confess I didn't expect this level of writing, plot and character development that was balanced and polished throughout. I feel this should have been released in hardcover and spotlighted by the publisher more.

This novel contains drama, mystery, intrigue, adventure, smuggling, an influential criminal ring, history, sharp wit, and a touch of romance all blended seamlessly. I found this novel easily rivaled the Sebastian St. Cyr series and for me may (may) have even out done it. If you enjoy historical mysteries with plenty of suspense and intrigue, Sebastian St. Cyr, Charles Lennox, the gaslight mysteries with Sergeant Frank Malloy, or the Lady Emily mysteries I think you owe it to yourself to read this novel.

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