



# The Face without a Frown: Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire

*Iris Leveson Gower*

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Georgiana's story is surely one of the most compelling and dramatic in late Georgian society and is the subject of numerous books and the highly successful film *The Duchess*. Love affairs, tragedy, high society, gambling and a host of illegitimate children are shared between herself, her best friend, her lover and her husband. A young emotionally demonstrative girl is married to an elderly reserved duke. She finds herself unprepared for her duties as duchess and discovers that her husband already has a mistress with whom he had a daughter. All the duke requires of Georgiana is to provide him with an heir?and this she seems?at first?unable to do. Starved of affection, Georgiana throws herself into the fashionable world and becomes the darling of society. Where Georgiana leads others follow and she set the fashions, whether for three foot high ostrich feathers or tall towers of hair with elaborate decorations. In 1782, the duke and duchess meet the fascinating Lady Elizabeth Foster, recently separated from her husband and living in restricted circumstances. Elizabeth attaches herself to Georgiana and is invited to return home with them. She becomes not only a close friend to Georgiana, but a mistress to the duke and bears him two illegitimate children. Surprisingly Georgiana supports this strange 'ménage à trois', but nevertheless she continues her bedroom duties to the duke eventually bearing him two daughters, and finally in 1790, the much sought-after son. The true love of Georgiana's life is the handsome young Whig politician, Charles Grey. She embarks upon an affair and in 1791 faces the worst crisis of her life when she discovers she is carrying his child. The duke gives an ultimatum?give up Grey and the child?or never see her three children again. She chooses her children.

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