



# Scarlet Women: The Scandalous Lives of Courtesans, Concubines, and Royal Mistresses

*Ian Graham*

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In 1965, an impoverished elderly woman was found dead in Nice, France. Her death marked the end of an era; she was the last of the great courtesans. Known as La Belle Otero, she was a volcanic Spanish beauty whose patrons included Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia. She accumulated an enormous fortune, but gambled it all away. *Scarlet Women* tells her story and many more, including:

Marie Duplessis, who inspired characters by both Dumas and Verdi;

Clara Ward, a rare American courtesan who hunted for a European aristocrat, but having married a Belgian prince, ran away with a gypsy violinist;

Ninon de L'Enclos, who was offered 50,000 crowns by Cardinal Richelieu for one night. Money left in her will paid for Voltaire's education.

Courtesans were an elite group of talented, professional mistresses. The most successful became wealthy and famous in their own right. While they led charmed lives, they occupied a curious position: they enjoyed freedom and political power unknown to most women, but they were ostracised by polite society. From the heterae of ancient Greece to the cortigiani onesti of 16th century Venice, the oiran of Edo-period Japan to the demimondaines of 19th century France, this captivating book--perfect for readers of *A Treasury of Royal Scandals*--uncovers the rich, colorful lives of these women who dared to pursue fortunes outside their societies' norms.

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