

The Spanish Bride

By Georgette Heyer

Based on the true story of Brigade-Major Harry Smith and the very young Spanish noblewoman he met and married during the Peninsular Wars, when the Duke of Wellington's forces fought Napoleon's army in Spain and Portugal.

After marrying Harry Smith when she was 14 years old, Juana Smith "followed the drum," marching at the back of the troops along with the other wives and the officers' servants. Juana became a camp favorite, charming all with her youthful enthusiasm.

In spite of the danger, Juana thrived on military life and her passionate, if somewhat stormy, relationship with Harry.

About the Author

Georgette Heyer's historical novels have charmed and delighted millions of readers. She wrote over 50 books, including Regency romances, mysteries and historical fiction. She was known as the Queen of Regency romance, and was legendary for her research, historical accuracy and her extraordinary plots and characterizations.

Reading Group Guide

1. On page 3 it is said of Harry Smith, "If he had not been such an efficient officer, he would have been damned as a harum-scarum youth and had indeed often been sworn at for a madman by his friends, and his various Brigadiers." Does Harry's fearless attitude make him a better or worse officer? Does he get more or less respect from his men because of it?
2. There are a few instances of overwhelming debauchery after a victory, like at Badajos, but generally the English army is very respectful of the people and the land they are moving through, even when it is technically enemy territory. How is that different from modern warfare? Do you think that was an effect of the times, the circumstances, or the leadership?
3. Harry shocks everyone when he announces that he is going to marry the young Juana in order to protect her. Juana shocks everyone when she makes clear her happiness at this arrangement. Was it love at first sight? How could Harry and Juana have known that they would be happy in each other's company after so little conversation?
4. All of the men in the army have great respect for Wellington, despite his peerage and his occasional stiffness. In fact, Wellington's mere appearance at a battle would turn the tide to victory, so inspired were the men. How much of Wellington's success do you believe was due to his strategy? How much do you believe was due to the affection his men had for him?
5. Far from wanting Harry to neglect his duties to dance attendance on her, Juana tells Harry that she would not allow him to neglect his duty. How does this moral adherence to the idea of duty

help Juana to get through the trials she faces as Harry's wife?

6. Harry and Juana's relationship is very mercurial. They fight and shout at each other one moment and apologize with professions of undying love the next. Does this quicksilver relationship make it easier or more difficult to endure the situations they are thrust into?
7. Though Juana maintains friendships with many of the men in the army, "never, from first to last, did the least whisper of scandal attach to her name." How is it that Juana can spend so much of her time with other men and never be accused of any sort of scandal?
8. When command of the Light division must be given over to a new General we are told that, "[i]t was by no means an easy task to command the Light division to the Light division's satisfaction." What does this tell you about how a military division of the time perceived itself and behaved? How do you think soldiers should balance their orders with their own views of how their unit should be run?
9. Juana is often called a little warrior or the best soldier in the army. What is it about her that makes her so good at adapting to the army's lifestyle?
10. Balls and dances and other social functions seem to be a frequent and expected entertainment. With the tragedies of poverty, hunger and war raging around them, why do the officers continue to hold these apparently extravagant social events?
11. At one point George says, "I often think that to be living in England after this wild, romantic existence would not give me half as much satisfaction... I have never felt such happiness since I became a soldier." Is this a reflection of George's personality, or the type of war they are fighting? Would you expect any soldier today to express similar sentiments? Why or why not?
12. Harry serves under the command of a number of different Generals in his time as Brigade-Major, one of them being General Skerrett, who gets a great many men killed, some of them Harry's particular friends. How would you deal with a person who was in command above you, but very obviously did not know what they were doing? Would it make a difference to you if lives were at stake?
13. The Light division clearly thinks that they are an elite fighting force. Do you believe that this is actually true? Or is this an opinion only they hold?
14. Colborne tells Harry that he must go to America in order to further advance his military career. Harry agrees to do it, though it means leaving Juana behind. This is a fate military families deal with on a regular basis. How does Juana deal with it? How would you?
15. During Harry's absence Juana chooses to stay more or less on her own, in London without the benefit of friends or family to live with. Would you do as well as she does in a foreign city with very little knowledge of the language? Would it have been easier or more difficult for her to have gone and stayed with Harry's family? Why?

16. Do you sympathize with the English in this story even though they are fighting the Americans? Are you sympathetic with Juana and Harry only or with the English people in general?
17. While Harry is in America, Juana waits anxiously for news of him. It takes months for news to actually reach her. In this day of instant communication, this sort of prolonged tension is nearly unimaginable. How do you think women of that era coped with the lack of information? Do you think you could live without email/cell phone/voicemail for a prolonged period of time?
18. After the battle of Waterloo, Juana is told that Harry is dead. It turns out to be a case of mistaken identity and Harry is very much alive, however for a time Juana truly believes that he was killed in the fighting. She tells West that after she finds his body and sees him one more time she won't live much longer. How do you feel about this statement? Is Juana's conviction romantic or is she being overly dramatic?