

CRAVING THE FORBIDDEN

Along with 'In Bed with a Stranger' this book made up The Fitzroy Legacy duo – two books, released in successive months featuring the same hero and heroine. I first heard about this unusual project when I went out for tea with my editor back in 2009. Over scones, champagne and a pot of Russian Caravan (luckily we're in agreement that choosing between tea and champagne is difficult and uncivilized, so often manage to squeeze in both) she asked if I'd be willing to be one of three of authors doing double-length stories. Given my tendency to write double the wordcount on every book, I'd agreed before she'd even finished the sentence - or told me that Lynne Graham and Penny Jordan were the other authors involved.

My excitement was tempered slightly by the fact that I was in the midst of my struggle to write *The Book That Would Not Die* (published eventually under the alternative title **Her Last Night Of Innocence**) but my subconscious decided to take matters into its own hands, and the morning after I got back from London I woke up with an extremely vivid scene in my head. It was set on a train leaving London and heading North (no prizes for guessing where you got that from, Subconscious) and was compelling enough to make me get out of bed and head straight for my computer to write it down. That was the starting point for the book, and over the following months as I wrestled with Cristiano and Kate, Kit and Sophie's story pieced itself together, bit by bit, in my mind. By the time I actually came to write it I had a notebook full of bits of dialogue and notes on scene ideas. Some of them never made it into the finished book, largely because I couldn't remember what they meant. What kind of scenes did I have in mind when I wrote 'beetroot' and 'doormat'??

The one thing that I hadn't quite got to grips with in my head when I started writing the book was the hero's character. I knew what he looked like...



(ie. Matthew MacFadyen)

...and I knew what kind of person he was ('distant' and 'disapproving' were the words written on the post-it notes on my computer screen) but I didn't really know why. At first I had him down as being an architect; precise and controlled, governed by rules and order. That was fine as far as it went, but there were still things that didn't fit and loose ends that wouldn't tie up, no matter how hard I yanked them. And then I realised that he wasn't an architect at all but a soldier and everything fell into place. Well, once I'd completely rewritten the first four chapters, anyway.

The course of the story changed dramatically after that, and took me down research routes that were fascinating, eye-opening and humbling. Kit Fitzroy is an EOD operative (that's Explosive Ordnance Disposal to the previously uninitiated, like myself) It's an extraordinary job, done by utterly extraordinary people, and while it's more prominent in the second book, it certainly informed Kit's character in the first.

Craving The Forbidden is almost entirely set in a hulking great castle on the Northumberland coast, based on an amalgam of Bamburgh and Alnwick and consequently imaginatively named Alnburgh. Usually I seem to set books in locations I can only dream of visiting but we'd had a great holiday in Northumberland the year before so this time all the research was conveniently done well in advance. Most uncharacteristically organised of me.

On the surface I suppose the conflict is staggeringly simple - always the best kind to work with, I find - and as old as the hills. The story is about the attraction of opposites - the spark between two people who come from different worlds and embody different values. Kit Fitzroy comes from a family whose name goes back to the Norman conquest and whose home has stood strong for four hundred years. Sophie Greenham has grown up on a painted London bus and has never stayed anywhere for more than a few months at a time. She's a bit-part actress and reinvents herself with every job that comes along, whereas Kit's identity seems set in the stone that forms Alnburgh's foundations. The idea of permanence makes Sophie shudder, but it's what keeps Kit going. All of that formed the background to the interaction between their characters and made it easy to write.

EXTRACT FROM THE BOOK

‘Are you looking for something?’

Her heart leapt into her throat and she spun round. Kit had emerged from one of the many small rooms that led off the passageway, his shoulders, in a perfectly-cut black dinner suit, seeming almost to fill the narrow space. Their eyes met, and in the harsh overhead bulk light Sophie saw him recoil slightly as a flicker of some emotion – shock, or was it distaste? – passed across his face.

‘I was l-looking for M-Mrs Daniels,’ she said in a strangled voice, feeling inexplicably like he'd caught her doing something wrong again. God, no wonder he had risen so far up the ranks in the army. She'd bet he could reduce insubordinate squaddies to sniveling babies with

a single glacial glare. She coughed, and continued more determinedly. 'I wanted to borrow some scissors.'

'That's a relief.' His smile was almost imperceptible. 'I assume it means I don't have to tell you that you have a price ticket hanging down your back.'

Heat prickled through her, rising up her neck in a tide of uncharacteristic shyness.

Quickly she cleared her throat again. 'No.'

'Perhaps I could help? Follow me.'

Sophie was glad of the ringing echo of her shoes on the stone floor as it masked the frantic thud of her heart. He had to duck his head to get through the low doorway and she followed him into a vaulted cellar, the brick walls of which were lined with racks of bottles that gleamed dully in the low light. There was a table on which more bottles stood, alongside a knife and stained cloth like a consumptive's handkerchief. Kit picked up the knife.

'W-what are you doing?'

Hypnotised, she watched him wipe the blade of the knife on the cloth. 'Decanting port.'

'What for?' she rasped, desperately trying to make some attempt at sensible conversation. Snatches of the article in the newspaper kept coming back to her, making it impossible to think clearly. Heart-throb hero. Unflinching bravery. Extreme personal risk. It was like someone had taken her jigsaw puzzle image of him and broken it to bits, so the pieces made quite a different picture now.

His lips twitched into the faint half-smile she'd come to recognise, but his hooded eyes held her gravely. The coolness was still there, but they no longer held their sharp contempt.

'To get rid of the sediment. The bottle I've just opened last saw daylight almost 90 years ago.'

Sophie gave a little laugh, squirming slightly under his scrutiny. 'Isn't it a bit past its sell-by date?'

'Like lots of things, it improves with age,' he said dryly, taking hold of her shoulders with surprising gentleness and turning her round.

'Would you like to try some?'

'Isn't it very expensive?'

What was it about an absence of hostility that actually made it feel like kindness? Sophie felt the hair rise on the back of her neck as his fingers brushed her bare skin. She held herself very rigid for a second, determined not to give into the helpless shudder of desire that

threatened to shake her whole body as he bent over her. Her breasts tingled, and beneath the severe lines of the dress her nipples pressed against the tight fabric.

‘Put it this way, you could get several dresses like that for the price of a bottle,’ he murmured, and Sophie could feel the warm whisper of his breath on her neck as he spoke. She closed her eyes, wanting the moment to stretch forever, but then she heard the snap of plastic as he cut through the tag and he was pulling back, leaving her feel shaky and on edge.

‘To be honest, that doesn’t say much about your port,’ she joked weakly.

‘No.’ He went back over to the table and picked up a bottle, holding it up to the light for a second before pouring a little of the dark red liquid into a slender, teardrop-shaped decanter. ‘It’s a great dress. It suits you.’

His voice was offhand. So why did it make goosebumps rise on her skin?

‘It’s a very cheap dress.’ She laughed again, awkwardly, crossing her arms across her chest to hide the obvious outline of her nipples which had to be glaringly obvious against the plainness of the dress. ‘Or is that what you meant by it suiting me?’

‘No.’

He turned to face her, holding the slim neck of the decanter. She couldn’t take her eyes off his hands. Against the white cuffs of his evening shirt they looked very tanned and she felt her heart twist in her chest, catching her off-guard as she thought of what he had done with those hands. And what he had seen with those eyes. And now he was looking at her with that cool, dispassionate stare and she almost couldn’t breathe.

‘I haven’t got a glass, I’m afraid.’ He swirled the port around in the decanter so it gleamed like liquid rubies, and then offered it up to her lips. ‘Take it slowly. Breathe it in first.’

Oh God.

At that moment she wasn’t sure she was capable of breathing at all, but it was as if he had some kind of hypnotist’s hold over her and somehow she did he said, her gaze fixed unblinkingly on his as she inhaled.

It was the scent of age and incense and reverence, and instantly she was transported back to the chapel at school, kneeling on scratchy woollen hassocks to sip communion wine and trying to ignore the whispers of Olivia Rothwell-Hyde and her friends, saying that she’d go to hell because everyone knew she hadn’t even been baptised, never mind confirmed. What vicar would christen a child with a name like Summer Greenham?

She pulled away sharply just as the port touched her lips, so that it missed her mouth and dripped down her chin. Kit’s reactions were like lightening – in almost the same second

his hand came up to cup her face, catching the drips of priceless liquor on the palm of his hand.

‘I’m sorry,’ she gasped. ‘I didn’t mean to waste it - ’

‘Then let’s not.’

It was just a whisper, and then he was bending his head so that, slowly, softly, his mouth grazed hers. Sophie’s breathing hitched, her world stopped as his lips moved downwards to suck the drips on her chin as her lips parted helplessly and a tidal wave of lust and longing was unleashed inside her. It washed away everything, so that her head was empty of questions, doubts, uncertainties: everything except the dark, swirling whirlpool of need. Her body did the thinking, the deciding for her as it arched towards him, her hands coming up of their own volition to grip his rock-hard shoulders and tangle in his hair.

This was what she knew. This meeting of mouths and bodies, this igniting of pheromones and stoking of fires – these were feelings she understood and could deal with expertly. Familiar territory.

Or, it had been.

Not now.

Not this...

Reviews

CRAVING THE FORBIDDEN (4) by India Grey: War hero Kit Fitzroy returns home for his father’s 70th birthday, but he’s dreading the reunion. His brother, Jasper, is afraid to tell the family the truth about himself, so his best friend, Sophie Greenham, is pretending to be his girlfriend for the celebration. Kit and Sophie make negative assumptions about each other, but there are also strong emotions and attraction between them, feelings that neither of them have ever experienced before. Grey knows how to spin a tale full of puzzles, misunderstandings and exploding love scenes. Her narrative is full of British humor and tragedy that her American audience will eat up, although it may take us Yanks just a bit to get used to the dialogue.

(Romantic Times 4 stars)

This book has a great blend humor from subterfuge (which also included keeping Jasper’s real love away from the party) and ANGST (or agnst as I prefer to spell it) from the forbidden love of Kit and Sophie. Kit isn’t an asshole but trying to protect his home, his family and cope with the lack of support and affection from his family. Sophie is a charming girl who is the perfect foil. He desperately needs someone to love him and Sophie is ready with open arms. Sweet, funny, and charming.

(Dear Author)