

Emily's Innocence (UK Modern August 2010)/Emily and the Notorious Prince (US October 2010)

She ran away from her fairytale lifestyle when she'd discovered her father was a cheat and a liar. Now she's struggling to make ends meet. When Prince Luis Cordoba sees Emily teaching underprivileged kids to dance, he instantly recognises a Balfour heiress. But Emily's pride won't make it easy for the prince to rescue her – especially when she's uncomfortably attracted to him...

The story behind the story...

On the surface, the story of how Emily's Innocence came to be written is pretty straightforward really, since it was part of the Balfour Legacy continuity series in which my editor had invited me to take part and so the characters and their storyline were given to me at the outset. However, the process of writing a book for a continuity series is very different from writing one in the ordinary run of things, and it requires a HUGE amount of creative thinking to bring the characters to life and make them move naturally along the path carved out for them. I've said elsewhere that it feels like writing backwards. Usually I start with characters and flesh them out enough so that they themselves dictate the course of the action through their responses and choices, however, in a continuity you already know (broadly) what's going to happen. You just have to make it work, and this means doing an awful lot of reading between the lines and thinking in the bath.

Anyway, when my editor first mentioned the idea of the series to me I have to admit I was a very easy-sell. (Her: 'Big English country house... wealthy patriarch... wives, mistresses... eight daughters...' Me: 'I'll do it.') I knew straight away that this was going to be exactly my kind of book, and I was even more excited when I got 'the bible' – a booklet detailing all the background, characters and story outlines for each of the sisters – through the post. Flicking through, finding the story that had my name on it and starting to read about Emily and Luis was a real heart-racing, hand-trembling moment because, in spite of my eagerness to be involved in the series there was a worry lurking in the dark recesses of my mind that I just wouldn't connect with the story or characters I'd been given.



But the moment I read the phrase 'incorrigible playboy bachelor' I knew everything was going to be alright. As someone who has veered helplessly towards serious, tormented heroes in the past it felt like an absolute gift to be presented with the task of creating a shameless playboy and I started writing with great enthusiasm. Luis quickly came to life on the page with his sarcastic asides and wisecracking one-liners and I adored writing the bits with him in it. OK, let's be honest – I just adored him. Here's the face I based him on...

However, it was when I got to about the halfway mark in the book that I suddenly hit a wall and realized that, much as I was having a ball creating a wicked,

unapologetically shallow hero with his mind permanently below his waist (or that of any passing beauty) I'd actually pretty much neglected to the 'hero' part of his job description. I'd always aimed to develop depth to him through the action of the book, but the way I'd written him that journey was simply going to be too long to accomplish in 250 pages! So, after a long and increasingly excited conversation with my editor one day I put down the phone and went back to the start, introducing a darker edge to Luis's character and a more powerful motivating force behind his behaviour. The original story outline in 'the bible' specified that his older brother had died, leaving Luis as the reluctant heir to the Santosan throne. By taking that a step further and making Luis indirectly responsible (or so he sees it) for Rico's death it opened up a whole goldmine of emotion for me to romp about in. (India Grey's Obvious Tip for Aspiring Writers – give yourself enough material to work with and it makes the whole business of getting words on the page a great deal easier!)

As for Emily, the outline specified that she was the adored baby of the family, 'however, the indulgence of her father and her sisters has not ruined her character – she remains down-to-earth, beautiful and good, a stronger version of her graceful, kind-hearted mother.' I have to admit when I read that my heart sank a little as it can be a challenge to create a heroine who is virtuous and sweet without making her come across like the annoying class swot. However, I decided Luis was my secret weapon here. He's exactly the kind of person who would address this head-on and voice all those issues directly, forcing Emily to confront the possibility that her irreproachable values and high moral standards are just hypocrisy and naivete in disguise. Introducing this alternative perspective on Emily's character early on made her feel more human to me, and from that point on I really bonded with her. Here's how I pictured her...



It was in email conversations with Natalie Rivers and Michelle Styles that I explored the importance of ballet in relation to Emily's character, and it threw up some interesting points. Emily is regarded as a brilliant dancer, which implies a certain ease with her own body and openness to physical expression, yet these were the very things that her uptight character struggled with most. Call me sadistic, but I like to see a character struggle, and so it was this discrepancy which formed the core of Emily's conflict and the basis for her journey. Who better than louche, sexy Luis to help her overcome her inhibition?

Extract from the book

She ran lightly up the steps to the back of the stage. Beyond the wings she could see her class of little dancers lined up and standing very straight which, along with the deep rumble of male voices, told her that the royal party was already there. Ducking her head she slipped silently onto the stage and took her place at the end of the line, glancing along the row of children as she did so.

Emily's heart stopped.

His head was bent as he talked to one of the little girls, the stage lights shining on his broad, perfectly-muscled shoulders and picking out the gold strands in his deliciously untidy tawny hair. Her stomach dissolved with horror. Oh God. It was him. It was really him. The royalty Kiki had been talking about was Luis Cordoba, Crown Prince of Santosa and he was making his way quickly along the line towards her.

Too quickly. The little dancers bobbed curtseys as he passed them, but he barely glanced at them. Emily had the sensation of standing on the track in the path of a speeding train, knowing that the moment of impact was almost upon her. He wouldn't recognize her, she reassured herself desperately. Why would he? They'd only met once—and then only for a couple of minutes in a situation which was a world away from this. He must meet thousands of women... *kiss thousands of women...*

Someone was speaking. Dimly, Emily registered that it was one of the council members who'd been round to look at the Larchfield premises in expectation of the youth centre's closure. 'This is one of the valuable volunteers who bring new experiences into the lives of our young people. Miss Jones is a graduate of the Royal School of Ballet...'

Like an automaton Emily bent her head and sank down in a curtsey. From an etiquette point of view it was the right thing to do, but more importantly it also gave her a great chance to avoid looking up at the man she'd last seen in the garden at Balfour, when he'd drawn her into the shadow of the trees and kissed her with an arrogance and an expertise which shocked and thrilled and horrified her.

Call me when you grow up...

She steeled herself, and looked up.

The express train hit. For a moment the breath was knocked out of her and it was like falling. Like skydiving into the sunset. And then realizing that you didn't have a parachute.

Luis Cordoba raised one fine eyebrow a fraction. Beneath it his eyes were a hard, dull gold. 'Really, Miss Jones?'

Oh God. That sexy accent. Not Spanish—Kiki had been wrong about that. Portuguese. It almost distracted her from the slight emphasis he placed on her name. Or-- correction-- the random name she'd given when she started volunteering at Larchfield. There was a part of her that had hated the deception and felt that she was betraying the friends she had made by keeping her real identity secret, but the anonymity was like armour. It was her protection and she'd clung to it. And now she felt like she was standing there, naked and wrapped only in the skimpiest of towels, and that the man standing in front of her had hold of the corner and was ready to pull it off her. Just for fun.

'Y-yes,' she stammered, looking up into that lean and perfect face, silently begging him not to give her away.

'The Royal Ballet?' he said softly. 'And from there you've chosen to come here to teach these children instead of concentrating on your own dancing career? Impressively altruistic. Your family must be very proud of you.'

Only she could hear the hint of challenge in his low, velvety voice. So he did recognize her, and he clearly knew exactly where to insert the knife; how to inflict the deepest wound where it wouldn't show. She could feel the eyes of everyone in the room-- the

council officials, Kiki, the children, getting restless now-- on her, but all of them combined were nothing compared to his cool, metallic glare.

'I'd like to think they would be,' she said breathlessly, and instantly regretted it. The words 'If they knew' hung in the air between them, and she waited for him to say them out loud. But Luis Cordoba didn't play things the straightforward way.

He nodded, slowly, and for a long moment his eyes stayed locked with hers. And then his gaze flickered downwards to the pink flamingo logo on the front of her black t-shirt.

'It's good to know that you haven't given up dancing altogether though,' he said gravely. A brief smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. 'Keep up the good work, Miss—?'

'Jones,' she croaked.

And then he was being ushered forwards by the council officials, who were no doubt keen to take him outside and show him the all-weather football pitch, a fraction of which had been paid for by a council grant. Out of the arc-light beam of his gaze Emily felt like a puppet that had suddenly had its strings cut. Around her the children relaxed into excited chatter, relieved at being released from the need to be on their best behaviour. Emily felt numb.

He'd got it all wrong. Bloody t-shirt. She wanted to run after him and grab his arm; force him to turn round so she could explain that she didn't dance at the Pink Flamingo, she worked behind the bar. He might have awoken something in her when he'd kissed her, but he hadn't changed her whole personality for God's sake...

But he was gone, leaving nothing but a whisper of his masculine, expensive scent in the air. The lights seemed to dim and the shadows around her thicken. It was too late.

The wolf had slipped back into the forest, and she was safe.

So why didn't she feel more relieved?

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Reviews

ROMANTIC TIMES (4.5 STARS) A year ago pampered heiress Emily Balfour fell for Prince Luis Cordoba of Santosa at her family's annual charity ball. She's since left home and is barely making a living for herself in London. When Luis accidentally finds her teaching ballet at a youth center, he hires her to come to Santosa and teach his orphaned niece how to dance. Despite her best efforts, Emily falls in love with Luis. But when his father dies after a long illness, there are factions in the palace that are convinced she is not a good candidate for queen. An utterly charming story of redemption and romance, made even more so by Luis' growing relationship with his young niece. The end is sure to melt the reader's heart.

Reviewed By: Rhomyly Forbes

CATAROMANCE

Emily and the Notorious Prince is another terrific read from award-winning author India Grey! She never fails to really get under the skin of her characters and thus always succeeds in creating richly drawn, flawed, vulnerable yet believable characters you instantly care about and root for. Emily is a beguiling mixture of fragility, strength and defiance whom you cannot help but admire and respect whereas Luis is a compelling, fascinating and

mesmerizing hero whom you'll fall in love with from the very first moment he strides onto the page.

MY ROMANCE REVIEWS

I really loved this one. My huge fangirl crush on India Grey just grows every time I read a new book of hers ... I understood and empathised so much with Emily's choices – both the running away and then agreeing to go with Luis, and finally trying to do the best thing by going home. And I felt so much for Luis, too, living with the guilt of what happened and the fear of not being up to the job.

And, as we've been discussing in the comments to my post about the whole series, this book is hilarious. I love when characters don't take themselves too seriously and when authors have fun with them too. The image of Luis idly colouring in the bikini on the picture of Miss Santosa while being lectured by his PR woman was laugh out loud funny, while also brilliantly establishing his character and his conflict. The final scene with the helicopter at the beach was one of the loveliest endings to a book I can remember.