

Mistress Hired For Billionaire's Pleasure

The story behind the story...

In some ways, Orlando and Rachel's story was the easiest of all the books I've written, which could be something to do with the fact that I'd fallen completely head over heels in love with the hero before I'd finished writing the first page. I'd had a whopping great crush on the man who became Orlando's 'face' for ages. James D'Arcy—tall, unmistakably English and terribly aristocratic looking was a brilliant representation of the dark, tormented hero that came so vividly to life in my head.



At the heart of the book is a conflict that is devastating in its simplicity—Orlando Winterton, an RAF fighter pilot who has always defined himself by his strength and courage, has been diagnosed with a degenerative sight condition which he finds impossible to come to terms with, and so is determined to keep secret. To this end, having had his dazzling career brutally cut short, he returns to the isolation of his grand ancestral home.

The nature of his condition set the tone of the book, making it the darkest I've written to date-- both literally and metaphorically. It's mostly set in winter time, in the fading light of short days and the moonlit rooms of a shadowy old house, and Easton Hall, is an important presence within the book. When Rachel, the heroine, arrives there she is daunted by its size, and puzzled by the darkness and air of melancholy that fills its vast rooms, but gradually, during the brief time she spends there she makes her mark on the house and its wild grounds, revealing long-hidden secrets and starting to feel at home.

The inspiration for the house was Dunham Massey, a beautiful property in Cheshire owned by the National Trust. Easton Hall isn't an exact likeness, but my favourite part of Dunham is the inner courtyard, around which the four wings of the house are built, and this found its way into the book as the setting for one significant snowy scene.

When I was writing the book I had a post-it note stuck to my computer monitor that had the words COURAGE and HEROISM written on it. (at least it started off being stuck to my monitor, but it kept falling off. One day while I was driving to pick the children up from school I found it stuck to my elbow.) These were the themes of the book, and the ways in which Orlando and Rachel perceived them were completely different. This provided the starting point for the conflict between them and the journeys they each had to make in order to get their happy ending.

The Music

This was a story that really seemed to lend itself to lots of music—I suppose quite naturally, since Rachel was a musician; certainly lots of the songs on the playlist are very piano-y. I had my ipod on constantly while I was writing, and kept finding more songs which fitted the story and the mood. However, there were a few core ones that inspired me and put me instantly into the world of the book (and still do, whenever I hear them!)

The Michael Nyman piece from the piano soundtrack was the tune I had on when I was writing the bit where Rachel runs away, and Chopin's beautiful Nocturne in E minor plays a very significant role in the story, so undoubtedly earned its place on the playlist.

Butterflies and Hurricanes by Muse and Vindicated by Dashboard Confessional were Orlando's anthems, perfectly communicating his iron self-control, and his bitterness and anger. I hardly expected to find a track which suited Rachel so spookily, but about halfway through the book I heard the Shakira song 'You're The One' and literally felt a shiver run down my spine. I'd just written a scene where Rachel is attempting to overcome her lack of domestic skill and cook dinner for Orlando. The words 'So I learn to cook and finally lose My kitchen phobia,' brought a very wide smile to my face.

To listen to the songs which inspired me, click below.

Extract from the book

Orlando stepped back, holding up his hands. His face was entirely in shadow.

'It's you' she whispered, relief coursing through her. 'It's you.'

'Who did you think?'

She shook her head, looking away, feeling suddenly foolish and ashamed. Ashamed of the person Carlos had turned her into. 'I wasn't thinking properly... I was just... frightened. Of the dark. Does that sound stupid?

He gave a low, mirthless laugh. 'No. Not at all.' He took a step towards her, into a square of moonlight falling through the huge windows, and it painted silver streaks in his black hair and shimmered on the hard planes of his lean face. 'You were crying.'

'Yes... It's ridiculous, but you were right. I totally lack courage in everything. I'm afraid all the time...'

She stopped as he reached out and lifted her right hand in his. Mesmerized she watched as he looked down at it with his strange intense stare, turning it palm upwards and unfolding her fingers with a sweep of his thumb, as if he were spreading the petals of a flower. And then he placed his own damaged, bandaged hand over hers, and Rachel closed her eyes, unable to control the series of seismic shocks that juddered up her arm and into some locked-up, secret part of her. Her hands had always been her way of expressing herself through the music that they created, but never had they brought her this kind of feeling. She felt like she held a tornado.

'That's OK,' he said bleakly. 'It's OK to be afraid. It's how you deal with it that matters.'

Looking downwards he could see the paleness of her skin against his. In the moonlight she was so white, like porcelain, and he found himself wondering whether, given the colour of her hair, she also had

freckles that he couldn't see. He wanted to raise her hand to his lips, to feel the coolness of her flesh against his face and breathe in the clean, young scent of her. He let his bandaged hand fall to his side, but somehow his other hand remained pressed against hers, palm to palm. Her fingers were almost as long as his, though finer. But as they meshed with his he could feel their incredible strength.

She moved towards him, until she could almost feel the electric current crackling in the small space that separated them.

'But I'm tired of being afraid. I want to be brave.'

She sounded both wistful and angry, and the words seemed to resonate in the charged air for a second, then, her eyes never leaving his she moved closer, closing the gap between their tense bodies and stood on tiptoe to brush her lips against his in a gossamer light kiss.

'Show me how to be brave,' she murmured.

His answer was a low curse as he captured her trembling mouth with a kiss of ferocious intensity. The miracle of his touch on Rachel's skin seared a path of purifying fire through the confusion and revulsion Carlos's touch had left in its wake. Suddenly, in the arms of this man, everything that had scared and confused her seemed so simple and so beautiful. One hand was still holding his, their fingers locked, but she lifted the other to his face, feeling the hard planes of his stubble-roughened cheek beneath her palm, the leanness of his jaw as he kissed her with a passion and purpose that made the past irrelevant. His hand was in the small of her back, moving upwards and coming to rest between her shoulder blades, holding her against him with a touch so light it was almost as if he was afraid to crush her.

'Rachel... No.'

Orlando pulled away, his fingers still entwined with Rachel's, until he was holding her at arm's length. He knew he was a hair's breadth from surrendering control, but the lure of oblivion was incredibly powerful. To be, for a few blissful minutes, the man he used to be—powerful, capable, in command, omnipotent.

But he wouldn't use her for that.

'Please...'

She had her face tilted up to his, so that he could feel the warmth of her sweet breath fanning his cheek. She was shivering, and he could hear the yearning in her voice.

'You don't need this.'

With monumental self-control he turned, running a hand through his hair as his gut twisted with desire and agonizing frustration. He felt like he had been kicked repeatedly in the stomach.

'I do. Oh God, Orlando, you don't know how much I need this. Please...'. She was almost sobbing with longing. He didn't turn, feeling his hands clench into fists, until the pain in his lacerated fingers provided a welcome distraction from his tortured conscience.

The last thing he wanted was a relationship, complications... companionship, for God's sake. He wanted to be left alone with his suffering and his pain.

But sweet Lord above, he wanted her. Wanted to lose himself in her. Now. Right now.

From the book *Mistress Hired for the Billionaire's Pleasure*
Harlequin Mills & Boon Modern Romance
Publication Date: August 2008
ISBN: 9780263203080
Copyright © 2008 by India Grey
® and ™ are trademarks of the publisher.
The edition published by arrangement with Harlequin Books S.A.
For more romance information surf to: <http://www.eHarlequin.com>
© India Grey

Reviews

"Mistress: Hired for the Billionaire's Pleasure is romantic fiction of the highest order. Written straight from the heart and searing with emotion and passion, *Mistress: Hired for the Billionaire's Pleasure* is a beguiling, dramatic and poignant tale of two flawed souls coming together that will tug at your heartstrings and leave you breathless.

Emotional, passionate and romantic, this modern day version of *Jane Eyre* will delight and enchant romance readers everywhere and leave them anxiously awaiting the next novel by this spectacular new writer of Modern Romance."

(Cataromance. 4.5 stars)

India Grey has written a spectacular and moving love story in *Mistress: Hired for the Billionaire's Pleasure*....You will absolutely learn to adore Rachel because she finds the courage she needs to stand up to this man, to show him what courage he needs to heal himself and step up to the plate for his son. She truly shows him her selfless love and in the end, heals him, bringing sunshine into his life.

Reading *Hired for the Billionaire's Pleasure*, I felt I could look into the souls of each characters, and cried right along with both of them.

(Marilyn's Romance Reviews)

MISTRESS: HIRED FOR THE BILLIONAIRE'S PLEASURE (4.5) by India Grey: On the run from a forced wedding, pianist Rachel Champion lands on Orlando Winterton's doorstep -- ironic, because it was a prior chance meeting with him that gave her the courage to bolt. A former pilot, Orlando is living in seclusion because he's losing his sight -- information he doesn't share with Rachel, even after they become lovers. Orlando tries to send Rachel away for her own sake, not realizing her happiness is already linked with his. Vividly detailed characters, an intense conflict and a high level of sensuality make this a fabulous read. This is one for the keeper shelf.

—Catherine Witmer

Romantic Times TOP PICK