

Spanish Aristocrat, Forced Bride

The story behind the story...

I've mentioned many times how the idea for Tristan and Lily's story came to me while I was putting on mascara. It was during the period of stress-related insanity we now fondly call the writing of *Taken for Revenge*, *Bedded for Pleasure*, and I could see instantly that the conflict in this new story would be so simple that I almost wept with relief. Given the mascara situation would have been very foolish indeed, so instead I reached for a pen and wrote the synopsis on the back of an envelope.

The inspiration for it had come from an article I'd read in a magazine in the dentist's waiting room about a certain celebrity's long and tortuous journey to have a family, and I knew that theme had such emotional resonance it couldn't fail to make a really powerful story. However, I did find myself wondering if it might be a teensy weensy bit depressing, even by my standards.

But I'm nothing if not shallow, and the lure of a handsome playboy tortured by a difficult past was too strong to resist. Tristan Losada Montalvo de Romero is staggeringly wealthy, fearsomely intelligent and breath-catchingly gorgeous, but happy he certainly isn't—a fact which he attempts to blot out in the classic, time-honoured alpha-male way—ie by sleeping with as many beautiful women as humanly possible. When he meets Lily Alexander at a party at his best friend Tom Montague's ancestral home he is interested only in temporarily blotting out the nightmarish reality of his complicated life and adding her to his list of one-night conquests.

Having come face to face (for about 1 minute 37 seconds) with Henry Cavill while in Dublin visiting lovely Abby Green just before I started writing the book, I knew that he had to be the face (and body) of Tristan.



Tom's home—Stowell Castle—was inspired by one of our favourite local haunts, Cholmondeley Castle. I wrote the opening few scenes when the daughters had broken up from school for the summer and we spent a lot of time hanging around in the gardens, working out where you could land a helicopter and which would be the best place to put marquees if you were having a party. This is my favourite view of the castle, from the lake where I built an imaginary folly on an island—Tristan's secret retreat from the world.



By the time school went back and I tripped off down to London for the annual Mills & Boon Authors' Lunch I'd progressed to the part of the story which takes place at Lily's home in

London. As she's a successful model I decided that she should definitely live in uber-chic, celebritytastic Primrose Hill, so Abby Green and I walked up there to check it out. We bought a picnic lunch from a deli on Regents Park Road and ate it on the hill in the September sunshine, then wandered round looking for the kind of house that Lily might live in. We were really excited to come across the pretty little lilac-painted house in Chalcot Square which for a brief period had been the home of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. I did my university dissertation on Sylvia Plath so had to resist the urge to throw myself down on the pavement outside and lick the paving stones where she once walked, and instead decided that in tribute this would be Lily's house in the book. (I'm sure Sylvia would be beyond thrilled to know this.)



The other important location in the book is Tristan's home ground—Barcelona. Now, I love the internet, and its value as a research tool can't be overstated, but there are some instances where it just seems ever so slightly inadequate—namely when I discovered a fabulous hotel tucked away in a tiny corner of the exquisitely pretty Placa de Sant Felipe (with its desperately sad history) and had a sudden and alarming urge to leave the kids with my mother and drag Him off that very weekend for some on-the-spot research. Perhaps fortunately the hotel was all booked up (no chance of them making space for me—unlike Tristan) so in the end I did have to fall back on the internet. Oh well. Spanish Aristocrat, Forced Bride was one of those rare books that was a joy to write. Really. Even the two o'clock in the morning bits and the early Sunday mornings at the keyboard. Why can't they all be like that?

Extract from the book

Lily shook her head and laughed softly, tilting her head back and looking up at the violet velvet sky, feeling suddenly light and breathless. Tristan levered himself away from the low doorframe where he'd been leaning, and came slowly towards her.

Her pulse quickened, and she felt the laughter die on her lips as electricity crackled through her. In the hazy half-light his eyes were the dark blue, his face grave and she sensed again that weary despair she had glimpsed in him earlier. Suddenly she found it impossible to reconcile this achingly beautiful man who wore sadness like an invisible cloak with the sybaritic playboy whose libertine lifestyle so fascinated the gutter press.

'You're right.'

Lily gave a small, startled gasp, wondering how he'd managed to read her mind, but then he raised one hand, gesturing to a recess in the wall beside her.

'The injured dove,' he said tonelessly. 'There it is.'

'Oh...' she frowned, stooping down and letting her hair fall across her face as she felt heat spread upwards. The bird was huddled in the back of the nesting recess, its wing held up awkwardly. The white feathers were stained with crimson at the place where the wing joined the body. 'Poor thing...' Lily crooned gently. 'Poor, poor thing...'

Tristan felt his throat tighten inexplicably. Her voice was filled with a tenderness which seemed to slip right past his iron defences and go straight into the battered, shell-shocked heart of him.

Usually he slipped between lives with the insouciant agility of an alley cat, letting the doors between the two halves of his world swing tightly shut behind him. But tonight—Dios—tonight he was finding it hard to leave it all behind. The raucous revelry of the party had grated on his frayed nerves like salt in an open wound, which was why he'd had to get away. But this...

... This gentle compassion was almost worse. Because it was harder to withstand.

'I think its wing is broken,' Lily said softly. 'What can we do?'

He looked out over the lawn to the glittering lights of the party. 'Nothing,' he said, hearing the harshness in his voice. 'If that's the case it would be best to end its suffering quickly and kill it now.'

'No!' Her response was instantaneous and fierce. She stood up, placing herself between him and the bird, almost as if she were afraid he was going to grab it and wring its neck in front of her.

'You couldn't. You wouldn't...'

'Why not?' he said brutally, as images of the place he had been earlier flashing into his head with jagged, strobe-lit insistence. This was just a bird, for God's sake. An injured bird; a pity, not a tragedy. 'Why not end its suffering?'

'Because you don't have the right to play God like that,' she said quietly. 'None of us do.'

Standing in the last light of the fading day she looked remote and almost mystically beautiful. Not of this world. What did she know about suffering? He could feel the pulse beating loudly in his ears, but her words cut through it, exploding inside his head. No? He wanted to say. Then who will? It's not power that makes men behave like God, but desperation.

He turned away abruptly, walking back towards the door to the stairs. 'It's not about having the right,' he said bleakly. 'It's about having the guts.'

‘Wait!’

He heard her come down after him, and the blue twilight darkened as she shut the door at the top of the stairs again. Tristan stopped on the landing, his shoulders against the closed door and watched her come down the stairs, melting out of the shadows like something from a dream.

Slowly she came down the last couple of steps and stood in front of him, shaking her head. ‘I don’t,’ she said in a low voice. ‘I don’t have the guts to kill it. What shall I do?’

He shrugged. ‘Sometimes you just have to accept that there’s nothing you can do.’

‘But that’s--’

‘Life,’ he said flatly. ‘That’s--’

But he didn’t finish, because at that moment the dusk was shattered by two loud explosions that detonated a chain of nightmarish images and sent an instant tide of adrenaline crashing through him. He saw her start violently, her head snapping round to the window, her eyes wide with shock. Pure instinct took over. Without thinking he reached for her, pulling her into his body, against his crashing heart as he shouldered open the door behind him and dragged her into the room beyond.

The next moment the sky beyond the two tall, arched Gothic windows was lit up with showers of glittering stars.

Fireworks. It was fireworks. Not bombs and mortars. Relief hit him, followed a heartbeat later by another sensation; less welcome, but every bit as powerful as he became aware of the feel of her breasts beneath the silk of her dress, crushed against his chest. As another volley of blasts split the sky she pulled away from him, laughing shakily.

And then she looked around her at the hexagonal room, with its pale grey walls and its arched windows and the bed with the carved wooden posts at its centre, and suddenly she wasn’t laughing any more.

‘Yours?’ she whispered.

He nodded. ‘All mine,’ he said gruffly. ‘The place where I come when I want to be alone.’

Their gazes locked. Time hitched, hanging suspended. Her full lips were parted, her breathing was rapid and her grey eyes shone with shimmering colour from the fireworks that exploded above them. Then she blinked and looked away.

‘Oh. I see, I’m sorry—I’ll go.’

She moved towards the door, but he got there first, slamming it shut and standing with his shoulders against it.

‘Tonight I don’t want to be alone.’

From the book Spanish Aristocrat, Forced Bride by India Grey Harlequin Mills & Boon Modern Romance Publication Date: September 2009 ISBN: 9780263874297 Copyright © 2009 by India Grey® and ™ are trademarks of the publisher. The edition published by arrangement with Harlequin Books S.A.

Reviews

If it's a gripping romance rich in drama and passion that you're after, then look no further than India Grey's latest: Spanish Aristocrat, Forced Bride! Her writing is poised and assured and sparkling with deep emotional resonance which will move you to tears. Her love scenes are pure poetry – sensuous, well-written and affecting – and her ability to pen an unforgettable tale that readers will remember long after the last page is turned simply stunning.

Cataromance 4.5 stars