

Getting Under Her Skin

CHARLOTTE STEIN REVEALS HER OBSESSION WITH 'FORBIDDEN' LOVES

By Jennifer Peters

CHARLOTTE STEIN HAS made a name for herself with her one-of-a-kind, offbeat characters, and her Under the Skin series really lets her show her skill. The first book, *Intrusion*, featured a sexy FBI agent-turned-sleepwalking shut-in, but *Forbidden* (Avon, Feb.) raises the stakes, setting a hot erotic romance in a seminary school/convent with a soon-to-be priest as her romantic lead.

It seems pretty taboo to have a religious backdrop for an erotic romance. So, what made you want to write *Forbidden*?

The idea came from a number of sources: the current spate of exorcism movies, reading *The Thorn Birds* for the first time, the actor Colin O'Donoghue and his part in the film *The Rite*. But the biggest inspiration for me was the same as it always is: I just deeply enjoy writing modern-day couples who still have enormous barriers in the way of their love.

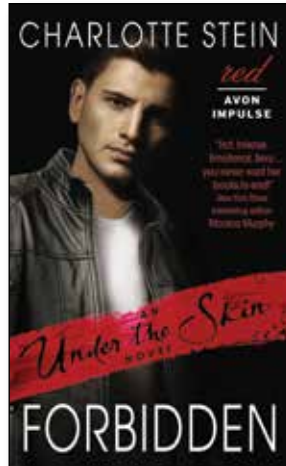
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Both the male and female leads are incredibly unique:

Killian as the less-than-pious seminary student, and Dot as his virginal love interest. What drew you to these particular characters? Originally I was meant to write the third book in the series, *Taken*, before this one. But Dot's voice was so strong in my head that as soon as I wrote the first line of *Forbidden*, I just couldn't stop. There was something so innocent yet powerful about her, and I had to run with it. Killian became clearer to me a little later, and with him, I would say it was his desire to do the right thing that made him compelling for me.

Dot especially is new to romance, and her innocence and naïveté come across very authentically. Considering how long you've been writing steamy love stories, was it hard to channel Dot's voice? For some reason, I find it easiest to get into the mind of someone so innocent. I always have — I think that's why people enjoy my new adult work. I don't really do anything special to get into their shoes, it just sort of happens.

What was the hardest part of writing Dot and Killian's story? Believably bringing them to a point where they would kiss. I wanted to really build up to it — to not make it a cheap, easy moment.



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There was definitely a lot of buildup. Right from the beginning, you lead readers through all kinds of twists and turns. Did you plan that, or did the characters surprise you with all their starts and stops? I think it was my intention right from the start to have their journey be quite fraught. It just wouldn't have worked if everything was simple and easy. So, yeah, I had some idea of where I wanted to go and what obstacles I wanted in their path. For me, a story is always easier to write when I can clearly see those obstacles.

Why do you choose to tackle such difficult characters and stories? I think

the biggest draw is in the series title: really getting under the skin of my characters, particularly the heroes. In each of the books, there is a gradual reveal of the hero's many layers — which I hope is rewarding to read.

As for the complicated love stories, I guess I just enjoy the challenge. I don't think I ever want to write easy stories that don't get to the core of my characters.

In addition to complex romances, you're known for your exceptional erotica.

In the past few years, erotic romance has really come to the forefront. What do you think made erotica so mainstream? I think it's partly *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but mostly I think it's what came before that: fan fiction. For the first time, there was an easily shared type of erotic writing that all women could get into and discuss. The fun of it being about a show or book you like helped, too. And, most importantly, there were like-minded people online to talk to and help validate your love of those stories.

I think that last one especially has been hugely important in popularizing sexy books because women are so programmed to believe that anything they desire is wrong. Fan fiction communities — and communities like Goodreads and other online forums — have helped overcome that. Women now know that their desires are okay.

What else do you have in store for readers this year? The final book in the Under the Skin trilogy, *Taken*,

is coming out in March. It's about a bookstore owner who accidentally takes a girl hostage and the strange relationship they strike up. Plus, I have the first book in my Dark Obsession trilogy coming out in June. That one features a street-fighting punk and a thug working for a crime boss. It should be fun!

For more about Charlotte, visit CharlotteStein.net.