

A BSB Interview With Colette Moody

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Consulting Publicist

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What made you decide to become a fiction writer?

Going all the way back to my early teen years (when dinosaurs roamed the earth), I concocted and jotted down stories that I found amusing—though sadly, most times my teachers did not share my enthusiasm. Once I hit my college years, I became addicted to mass-market historical romance novels, and I even joined a small local romance-writer's workshop that including several other hopeful women with similar aspirations. At that time I completed three traditional (a.k.a. heterosexual) historical romances that were all apparently still unconventional enough for the genre, which admittedly had very stringent requirements, to be summarily rejected by every publishing house and agent to which I submitted them.

Back then (what I call the pre-internet, pre-Facebook, carry-your-ass-to-the-library, Rococo period), I wasn't aware of any lesbian-themed historical romances being published, though now with the advent of LGBT publishers like Bold Strokes Books, as well as more queer-themed books being carried by mainstream publishers, I'm able to be a small part of the kind of fiction movement I always wished for.

What type of stories do you write? And why?

I write the kind of fiction I love to read—romantic, one part adventure and one part screwball comedy, and nearly always historical, though the time and locations vary. One thing that pervades my writing is fast-paced dialogue/banter. In my mind, the most compelling part of a story is what the characters say to each other, so I tend to focus on that quite a bit. My characters usually oscillate from quick-witted to flirty, droll, and self-deprecating, hitting all the settings in between.

As for why I favor historical settings, I think there is an inherent romanticism in the past, so incorporating the past into the story, in my opinion, deepens the color and allure of the story exponentially.

What do your family/friends think about your writing?

Everyone has been very supportive and excited, though to be honest, because of my previous failures getting published, I have been hesitant to announce my forthcoming book to everyone. I'm slowly telling people one at a time as the release date gets closer, but I have this completely irrational fear that somehow this could all be some strange David Lynch dream sequence where a man with a can of succotash for a head appears and tells me, backwards, that this is not reality. I can only hope that this fear will vanish once I'm actually holding a copy of *Original Sin* in my hands.

Admittedly, there is also a slight Clark Kentian aspect of living a double life. By day, I'm a geeky smart-ass with a corporate job and only marginal social skills. But by night, I'm the published author of snarky, sexy romps.

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Where do you get your ideas?

My ideas are all born from my own personal interests. I'm fascinated by both history and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Typically, my ideas in their larval stage are something as simple as a single scene or a vague scenario like "wouldn't it be *hysterical* if someone got trapped on their roof naked?" (They're not all gems, people.) My mental sieve naturally filters out the chaff, and the ones that keep popping back into my head and cracking me up ultimately get written down and become the kernels of novels.

How do you write; do you plan everything out or just write?

So once the kernels are on paper, I begin crafting a general plot around them—sort of filling in the tweens so that there is a cohesive story. Because things are so sketchy, I have to write linearly. So even if the one scene that inspired the novel is in the next-to-last chapter, I can't write that part until I've written everything that precedes it. I find that I work well with that kind of flexibility, and it's fun for me when I know that the story can, at any time, take a turn and go in a different direction—as long as I can still devise a way to incorporate all the elements. It's also a good way to create unpredictability, which, for me, helps make the story more engaging.

I frequently write dialogue by actually acting out the scene, with me doing all the parts. Thank God that technology has advanced to the point that when people see me doing this in the car, they assume that I'm on the phone.

What makes *The Sublime and Spirited Voyage of Original Sin* special to you?

Original Sin is my first lesbian-themed novel. Prompted partly because there are so many more opportunities now for GLBT fiction to be published, and partly because I wanted to see if I could complete a book and be thoroughly pleased with the results, this is the book I've always wanted to write. I put it in my favorite era—the golden age of piracy, and used the rule of thumb that when I went back and reread it, if it made me laugh or otherwise moved me, it stayed in. After all, I was operating under the assumption that it was highly likely that I would be the only person reading it. Thankfully, it appears that won't be the case (stay away, succotash man!).

How much of yourself and the people you know are in your characters?

You know, that's actually a pretty funny question because I don't notice the similarities between my characters and me until I go back later, or until someone points them out to me (i.e. "This character is you, isn't it?" or "That was such a 'you' thing to say"). For the record, these are inevitably the lines rife with flippant sarcasm—never anything heroic or sensitive. So yes, some of my characters tend to speak the way I speak, flirt how I might flirt, and bungle things irreparably, as only I can.

Regarding other people reflected in my characters, there is a little of that (my favorite example is a vicious pirate based on an incompetent manager I had. It's not a pretty death).

There is much more of my friends and associates in my next book, *The Seduction of Moxie*, which chronicles the adventures of some rather wild people who cross the country during prohibition. You'd be amazed how many of the stories are based on true tales of debauchery that I either witnessed or that people shared with me.

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Which lesbian authors inspired you the most? Do you have a favorite of this author(s)?

There have been a couple of lesbian-themed books that I found really significant. I read *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown while I was in high school, and what was remarkable was its ability to document the rampant marginalization of gays in a time when it was more norm than exception. That novel showed that you could write honestly from the LGBT perspective, and that people would both publish and read it.

Similarly, about fifteen years later I read *Tipping the Velvet*, by Sarah Waters. That book would evoke some of the same feelings in me, but this was an historical tale, my personal favorite, and the protagonist's journey was complicated and painful in a whole different way. God bless the liberal British folk who not only made that book a mainstream hit, but also made a BBC miniseries out of it.

Do you have any suggestions for new writers?

As thoroughly unworthy as I feel to give anyone advice (unless it's of a political nature. Why does no one ever ask me for *that?*), I would suggest that people write for themselves. Write the story and characters that you want and enjoy because, otherwise, it will be a long, frustrating journey that may make you question your abilities. Once your book is chosen for publication, there is no greater validation or sense of pride than knowing that you've been true to yourself and not compromised your integrity.

When you're not writing what do you do for fun?

I'm obsessed with politics, so I spend a fair amount of time listening to news and punditry. In case that does not make me sound insufferable enough, I also have a penchant for Dungeons and Dragons, old-school style, with dice and Diet Mt. Dew (for those in the know, I'm chaotic good). I also enjoy travel, classic movies, cooking, video games, and of course, reading.



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