

Her Only Desire: A Novel

By Gaelen Foley

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From the exotic splendors of India to the elegant ballrooms of Regency London, celebrated author Gaelen Foley pens the enthralling tale of a luscious beauty who has sworn never to call any man her master, and the powerful marquess whose passion threatens to conquer her. . . .

Born into the wealthy British ruling class of India, Georgiana Knight is as unconventional as she is beautiful. She has sworn not to marry till she meets a man who will treat her as an equal–but that vow doesn't appease her sensual curiosity. When Ian Prescott, the Marquess of Griffith, arrives on a mission to defuse the threat of war, she is immediately drawn to the mysterious and darkly handsome diplomat, and cannot resist provoking the hidden lust that smolders beneath his cool surface.

Ian is mesmerized by Georgie's alluring mystique but burdened by a dark secret. And she is a temptation he cannot afford. But when she becomes entangled in his mission, she must be secreted away to England for her own safety. Georgie finds herself in the unfamiliar world of aristocratic London, where Ian becomes her guide, her confidant . . . her seducer. His incendiary kiss sets her soul on fire, and Georgie knows she will never be satisfied until she has made this magnificent man her own.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist
Ian Prescott, the Marquess of Griffith, had come to India to stop the Maratha Empire from going to war with Britain. Ian was counting on the help of Gabriel and Derek Knight, British cavalry officers serving in India, but Ian never expected that their sister, Georgiana, would also want to play a part in the diplomatic negotiations. Just like her aunt and namesake, the infamous "Hawkscliffe Harlot," Georgiana refuses to let any man tell her what to do. But when the diplomatic mission turns dangerous, Georgiana finds herself leaving India for England, where her life becomes even more entangled with the one man who just might be her match. Foley deftly adds an intriguing measure of exotic India to her usual classic Regency historical mix in the first in what promises to be an exceptionally entertaining and sexy new "Spice" trilogy. *John Charles*
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About the Author
Noted for her “complex, subtly shaded characters, richly sensual love scenes, and elegantly fluid prose” (Booklist), Gaelen Foley is the nationally bestselling author of eleven critically acclaimed historical romances from Ballantine Books. Her passionate, sophisticated love stories are published in eleven languages and have won numerous awards, including the National Readers’ Choice Award, the Booksellers’ Best, the Golden Leaf, the Award of Excellence, and the HOLT Medallion. To learn more about Gaelen Foley, her novels, and the romantic Regency era in which her books are set, visit her website at www.gaelenfoley.com.

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Chapter One

India, 1817

Beneath a bold sky of peacock blue, the sun-baked city of Calcutta unfurled along a palm-lined meander of the Hooghly River like a living tapestry, or a rich silk shawl that billowed on a spice-laden breeze.

Flocks of birds swirled around the curving spires of ancient Hindu temples, under whose profusely carven gateways worshipers in flower-bright robes bathed on the stone steps leading down to the water. The noisy bazaar also hugged the misty riverside, a tumult of haggling, jumbled stalls and tents offering everything from Afghan carpets to aphrodisiacs made of rhinoceros horn.

Farther away from the crowded banks, the river bustled with all the teeming commercial activity of the British capital of India. Monopolies long held by the East India Company had just been lifted; there were fortunes to be made, and now it was anyone’s game. Merchants and traders all along the docks loaded square-rigged vessels with their goods, bound for distant worlds.

Amid all of this chaos and exuberance, a low-slung schooner docked quietly.

A tall, formidable Englishman stood leaning at the rails with his hands planted wide, his chiseled jaw taut. His imposing size, hawk-eyed stillness, and the gentlemanly reserve of his London attire distinguished him from the commotion as the grubby, barefoot sailors raced around behind him at their tasks, dropping anchor, taking in sails.

Dark-haired, with stern, patrician features, his gray-green eyes gleamed with intelligence as he searched the quay-side panorama in guarded watchfulness, taking it all in, and brooding on his mission . . .

Each year, by the end of September, when the torrential rains of monsoon tapered off and the skies cleared, and the churning floodwaters receded, then came the season of blood: the season of war. Even now, the drums beat; many miles away, the armies gathered.

October had come. The drying ground would soon harden enough for caisson wheels and cavalry charges. Soon the killing would start.

Unless he could stop it.

Looking slowly over one broad shoulder, Ian Prescott, the Marquess of Griffith, scanned the riverboats nearby, well aware that he was being followed.

Well, nothing new in that. He had not yet glimpsed his pursuer, but in his line of work, a man developed a sixth sense about such things or he didn't last long. No matter. He was harder to kill than the average courtier, a fact that assassins in several foreign courts had learned, to their woe.

Concealed inside his impeccably tailored clothes he carried a discreet arsenal of weapons; besides, the rival colonial powers in the region could not assassinate a diplomat of his rank without causing an international incident.

Still, it would be nice to know who was tailing him.

French? he mused. Likeliest suspects, as ever, though he could not rule out the Dutch, much aggrieved by the recent loss of Ceylon to the British. The Portuguese maintained a strong presence at Goa. No doubt all three had agents out trying to learn what the British were up to.

If the spy had been sent by the Maharajah of Janpur, well, that was another matter, and made for a slightly more unpredictable affair. But whoever it was, if they meant to kill him, he thought, they would have tried by now.

He'd simply have to watch his back and take it as it came.

As the gangplank banged down onto the stone ghats leading up from the water, Ian beckoned to his trio of Indian servants, stole one last, casual glance over his shoulder, and then went ashore.

His black boots struck the gangplank hard with his every brisk stride, small spring-bolted blades hidden inside the leather soles. His silver-handled walking stick contained a sword, and strapped beneath his muted olive morning coat he wore a loaded pistol snug against his ribs.

He climbed the ghats with his servants in tow, but paused for a second at the top of the stairs. Facing the thronged, seething cauldron of the bazaar, he wished he'd had more time to prepare, to educate himself in depth on the country as he normally would on his assignments, but they had needed him right away.

Though he was a recognized expert in conducting the sort of delicate negotiations soon to take place, Ian had never been to India before. He had been on holiday in Ceylon when he had been summoned, stretched out on a white-powder beach and trying very hard to escape a few private demons of his own. Trying to reason his

way through or perhaps around the emptiness that had grown so deep over the past few years, leaving him in this inward state of isolation, hollow and numb.

But with no more success than before in resolving his carefully concealed pain, he had been all too happy to volunteer his services to help sort out the unpleasantness with the Maratha Empire. Until he got his bearings, however, developed more of a feel for this place and its people, he knew he would have to tread with extreme care and meet all who crossed his path with meticulous courtesy. The worst thing any diplomat could do was to unwittingly give offense.

Fortunately, he had a general grasp of the rules and a little of the two main languages he'd need for the mission, Bengali and Marathi, thanks to his trusty guide and interpreter, Ravi Bhim. For now, the bazaar loomed ahead. There was no way to go but through it; he moved on.

The moment Ian stepped into the main aisle designated as the spice market, a wall of scent washed over him, pungent and intoxicating. His eyes smarted at the sharp flavors hanging thickly in the humid air: black pepper and cloves, turmeric and mustard seed, all sold atop wide, woven platters by robed men willing to haggle. Ian waved his hand, declining their bargains, and pressed on. There were sacks of cardamom, saffron, and mace; fine nutmeg by the pound, coriander, sultry cinnamon.

He glanced behind him again and saw one of his servants dawdling. The wide-eyed coolie, balancing one of Ian's traveling trunks on his bare back, had stopped to watch a snake charmer coaxing a deadly spectacled cobra from its basket, enchanting the serpent with the winding melody from his reedy pipe. Another turbaned man played a pair of deep-voiced drums. Their song competed with the Muslim call to prayer now echoing down from the minarets of all the mosques across the city.

The coolie saw Ian's raised eyebrow and blanched, hurrying after him. Soon they were in the thick of it—close heat, body odors, a clamor of polyglot voices, the motion of the place whirling around him like a dervish dance. His earnest attempt to absorb everything dissolved into a dizzying overload of sight and smell and sound.

His senses throbbed as he walked down a narrow aisle lined with a delirious array of Eastern treasures. Kanchipuram silk so fine it would have made his fashionable mistress back in London moan with pleasure. Gold and silver-thread brocade; printed cotton light as feathers; gorgeous intricate carpets; bright beads and terra-cotta animals; leather sandals; dyes and powder paints; rare cypress furniture, and gilded figurines of multi-armed goddesses and blue-skinned gods.

Moving through the market, Ian and his servants were carelessly jostled by people who were as varied as the goods they had gathered to buy and sell. Hindu ladies, rainbow-dressed and silken-scarved, bantered back and forth, their smiles beaming, the married ones marked by the distinctive red dot, or bindi, on their foreheads.

English officers in uniform rode past the perimeter astride prancing horses worthy of Tattersall's. Buddhist monks in saffron robes strolled by with shaved heads, almond-shaped eyes, and radiant smiles as though they hadn't a care in the world.

Certainly the peace-loving monks had no idea that another war was brewing.

A small group of Muslim ladies covered in black from head to toe had stopped to browse at a jeweler's stall, and one was leading her child by the hand, a small boy. The tot was eating a mango, and Ian smiled faintly,

for the youngster looked about five years old, the same age as his son.

Ignoring a vague pang in the region of his heart, he looked around to find a trinket for his heir before his mission got underway in earnest. This was a ritual he always observed no matter where in the world his work took him. There might not be time later. He chose an elephant of carved teakwood and approached the artisan.

“Koto?” Though he was never one to haggle unless the fate of nations hung in the balance, not to protest the first stated price would have been an insult to the trader.

And so Ian haggled to show his respect.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anthony Robin:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open as well as read a book eligible Her Only Desire: A Novel? Maybe it is to be best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have other opinion?

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