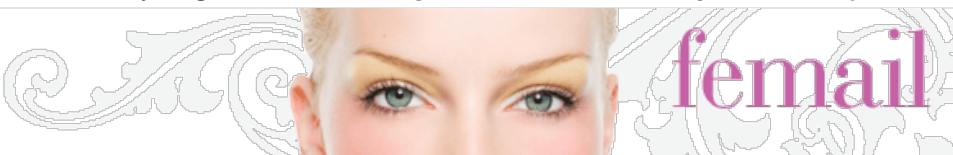


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## How Churchill's granddaughter was seduced and then brazenly betrayed by 'scribbling dwarf' Martin Amis

By **EMMA SOAMES**

Last updated at 9:17 AM on 06th June 2009

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Like all good relationships it started as a friendship. But only 24 hours after I began an affair with Martin Amis, I discovered that he had spent the night with another woman.

It was early 1975, and our friendship began to turn to something else following a long and involved game of backgammon at my flat in London. I had taught him how to play months before, and he had annoyingly and consistently started to win.

I confess I was truly surprised when he made a move on me that night, not least because at that point I believed him still to be in a relationship with his then girlfriend, the writer Julie Kavanagh, who was also a close friend of mine. I had always thoroughly enjoyed his company and never viewed him as a potential suitor because he was with Julie.

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**Bright young thing: Emma Soammes during the Seventies**

So I asked him about where things stood with Julie, and he told me that it was over between them. I accepted this without further questioning and we ended up spending the night together.

However, the path of love was not initially smooth. We all know sex can ruin good friendships, and I feared losing a friend. With good reason, it seemed - the next day he disappeared and didn't get in touch as he said he would.

At that point, I was prepared to write off the previous night as a blip in a platonic friendship, although my feelings for him were changing. It was then I discovered, through a mutual friend, that he had spent the very next night with another woman.

My fury at this knew no bounds, and when I confronted him, I told him that, if he was going to behave in that way, there was no question of us spending any time together and that there was a door to the flat through which he could walk right then.

But he apologised profusely - which was his usual method of mollifying a cheated lover - and, yes, I forgave him.

Perhaps I don't have very high expectations of my boyfriends, but I thought then and still do that in the course of the love affair that followed, Martin was affectionate, he laughed at my jokes and didn't seek to control me.

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(Oh, and he couldn't look a gift horse in the mouth)





**Martin Amis and Julie Kavanagh: The couple dated before Amis moved onto her best friend Emma Soames**

My memories of the year we spent together have been playing on my mind this week since the woman Martin left to be with me, Julie Kavanagh, wrote a detailed account of her relationship with him in a quarterly journal published by the high-minded Economist magazine.

It wasn't until I read her account of their relationship that I realised that, while Martin was seducing me, he hadn't told her their relationship was over. Julie and I have been friends for years, but have never discussed the relationships we had with Martin in any detail.

She wrote: 'I went into the sitting room and saw Martin slam down the receiver. The address book was lying open at S. It was Emma Soames, my best friend.'

Full of remorse, I called Julie earlier this week and apologised to her for this unknowing treachery on my part.

'Really, didn't you know?' she said. I explained what was said between me and Martin, she laughed and we went on to have a good old gossip about the man who behaved honourably to neither of us - though not at the same time.

But at the time, remember it was the Seventies - none of us were judgmental about the giddy reel of our relationships.

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What emerges now is that there was a certain modus operandi to the romantic adventures of Mr Amis. There was probably always an overlap in all his relationships with women - to my knowledge he never left someone simply to be alone. He was no Greta Garbo. That meant that the edges of all his relationships were likely to be tinged with duplicity and infidelity.

I now know that Martin started an affair with me before he had formally separated from Julie, and I also conclude - 30 years later - that he almost certainly was 'seeing' my successor, Mary Furness, a Times Literary Supplement contributor, before he left me.

I have chosen to keep my counsel for three decades on what precisely went on between myself and Martin Amis. But I feel the time has come to write about the man my brothers took great pleasure in calling 'the Scribbling Dwarf'.

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**Martin Amis with his second wife Isabel Fonseca at the Serpentine Gallery in 1995**

Our paths first crossed in the early Seventies, when he was dating Julie. Of course, I had known about him for some years, partly through reading his seminal novel *The Rachel Papers*.

We were all in our mid-20s and living in London, and became part of a gang which included writer Christopher Hitchens, American *Vogue's* current editor Anna Wintour and poet James Fenton.

Soon, I found myself bumping into Martin everywhere: a diminutive figure shod in stacked shoes - a la Monsieur Sarkozy - and velvet trousers, his hair lapping over his coat collar.

I wasn't physically attracted to him then, but he was fun and clever. He spoke in a quiet drawl and what came out of his mouth was consistently original and hilarious.

Maybe it's in my Churchillian genes (I am one of Winston's granddaughters), but I too love playing with the language and Martin and his partner-in-crime Christopher Hitchens were past masters at this.

They practically invented a new English slang - 'Brill in the bag' for a good lover, and 'hoping for a groping'. At this time Julie was 'playing saucepans' with Amis after he moved into her flat, perched romantically in the treetops of Pimlico.

What was it about him that brought out the nesting instinct in her, I wonder now? Where I, like many of my contemporaries, had only champagne and Kiehls moisturiser in the fridge, Julie became thoroughly domesticated, cooking up delicious dinners and throwing excellent parties.

We were a gang, but often Julie, Martin and I spent evenings without the rest of them, during which I taught Martin backgammon. He took to it with an alarming alacrity, and then had the audacity to beat me: once I threw the board at him, frustrated at my inability to win.

Later, he owned up that he had been secretly reading books about the theory of the game. Somehow in those days, boning up on anything or taking something seriously was not acceptable. But that was Martin - his intellectual curiosity was considerable and he had to win at everything he did.

Once we started dating and had overcome the hiccup of his initial infidelity, we began to spend a lot of time together.

Both of us were living and working in London - he was literary editor of the *New Statesman*; I was working on *Londoner's Diary* at the *Evening Standard*.

We were an item. We'd meet up after work at the then very fashionable Zanzibar in Covent Garden and dined in cheap local restaurants around Bayswater, where he lived at least two nights a week. Sometimes we went to parties together. He was easygoing and attentive. I was happy with him and having fun.

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**Byronic magnetism: Martin Amis pictured in the 1970s. His Jagger lips and intelligence attracted many socialites**

I was taller - he's only 5ft 4in, I'm just 5ft 7in - but this wasn't a problem for Martin. I lived in very high heels during those years and Martin never asked me to go out wearing flats. And I know not why, but I have a weakness for small men.

My last boyfriend, the late architect Christopher Bowerbank, was also a lot shorter than me.

I also like men who are cleverer than me. Like playing tennis with a pro, it raises your game. I didn't go to university, and I suppose by Martin's standards I was a bit of an ignoramus. But it wasn't an issue.

We shared many mutual friends and he introduced me to fascinating characters like Clive James and James Fenton although, to be brutally honest, I found much of the literary world a tad crusty and dishevelled.

Still, Martin wasn't so enamoured of it all that he wasn't prepared to take on board a different set of people. This included, notably, my family. I am one of five siblings and we stick close.

During the Seventies, my parents lived in a millhouse in Hampshire, where every weekend most of us would congregate, bringing with us various friends - but only those we thought would contribute to the huge fun that we had on our own.

I knew Martin would enjoy meeting my family - particularly my brothers - and that they would have a worthy sparring partner in him. So, early on in our relationship we roared down the M3 in my mini with blacked-out windows to spend the first of many weekends at the Mill on the Floss, as I called it.

Having brought us all up rather strictly, by then my parents - my father Christopher was for a time the British ambassador to Paris - were more relaxed about their children and seemed to enjoy the invasion of youth every weekend.

To an outsider, it must have been a daunting experience. We are a noisy family who don't particularly believe in listening so we all talk at once - very loudly.

My brothers were always deeply suspicious of my boyfriends who they regarded as distinctly alternative. 'Did he go to School?' my brother Nicholas would ask of me - meaning Eton. (The answer was invariably no). They took to Martin at once, though not everyone in my parents' household - where visitors were expected to leave a tip for the help - was so charmed by him.

Martin once gave the daily a signed copy of his book, Dead Babies, and she flicked through it looking for the tip she would have greatly preferred. (Indeed, my mother used to leave a £5 note for the daily pretending it came from Martin).

I affectionately called him Little Keith - after a small character with a passion for darts who appeared in one of his early books. But even that was trumped by my brothers, who came up with the Scribbling Dwarf, a nickname which he bore with fortitude.

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Emma Soames in 1973, and today, as editor of Saga magazine

At home, we all used to play a game of dreaming up people's most unlikely remarks. Martin's was: 'You sound depressed. D'you want to talk about it?' because he was not interested in listening to people's personal woes: he has a core of steel.

But while he may scorn the language of feelings, perversely he could be romantic and say very sweet things.

Apart from the hilarity of Hampshire, on other weekends we repaired to Barnet in North London to stay with his father, Kingsley, and stepmother, Elizabeth Jane Howard.

This was a fairly eccentric and highminded set-up. The house was comfortable but shambolic - you slept in any room that didn't have another body in it. Life revolved around long visits to the pub, where Martin would discuss politics with Kingsley - or listen to Kingsley sounding off on the subject.

I was quite scared of Kingsley, who most surely did not suffer fools at all, but he was always kind and forbearing towards me.

Elizabeth Jane was long-suffering to the point of sainthood: she appeared to put up with Kingsley's boorish habits and lack of consideration with extraordinary serenity - until she quite abruptly left him some time later.

One puzzling but attractive aspect of Martin's character was his unquestioning love for his father. Kingsley was a supremely selfish man, and while he expected Martin to read all his work and then to discuss it with him in long sessions in the pub, he adamantly refused to read any of Martin's books.

As his girlfriend, I found this deeply wounding and very rude, but when I asked him for his reaction, Martin just laughed it off - he was totally forgiving of his father's behaviour.

He was an attentive son who - during the time that I was with him - visited his father frequently and showed unconditional loyalty under sometimes most trying circumstances.

We also made the pilgrimage to Ronda in Spain where Martin's mother Hilly lived with her partner Lord Kilmarnock in a rundown old farmhouse in the middle of nowhere.

There, we played pool, walked and talked, and howled with laughter at Hilly's eccentric but utterly loveable way with words.

By this time, Martin and I were through the first months of blistering physical attraction and had settled into being a couple. But there was absolutely no talk of the future on either side.

The 'm' word never came up and 'the cusp of hell', as Martin used to describe that moment when women suddenly want to get married, had not descended on me.

I suspect my father had other ideas, though, when he invited Kingsley Amis and Elizabeth Jane Howard to lunch at the Mill. Everyone was on their best behaviour for this event: for once Kingsley didn't drink too much, and my parents were most solicitous

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- yet it didn't really gel.

I suspect around that time alarm bells began to echo in Martin's consciousness - he was fond of me, but he most surely didn't want to spend the rest of his life with me.

Our relationship eventually ended - as all of his did, but not so many of mine - with him leaving me. Looking back today, there were signs over the previous couple of months of our year-long affair which I had chosen to ignore.

He became a tad less attentive, and restless, and once he refused to take me home from a party. Yet the end still took me by surprise. He wrote me a long, touching letter out of the blue - to which I never replied - advising me our relationship could not continue. He never really gave me a reason and I could not bring myself to ask for an explanation, which would have been too painful to hear.

But perhaps the end was inevitable. Apart from anything, our work was important to both of us.

A few weeks later, I discovered from a mutual friend that he was seeing my successor Mary Furness. It was not a surprise he was seeing someone else because he was always seeing somebody. And Furness moved in the same circles.

Given his nature and our ages - we were only in our mid-20s and far from ready to settle - I suppose it was just a matter of time before one of us moved on. Nevertheless, the language of the heart does not listen to logic. It felt like a betrayal, and for a couple of months I was pretty miserable.

I have to confess to enacting a petty revenge after we broke up. I had a cleaner - also called Emma - whom I had persuaded also to clean Martin's flat.

So I called her up and told her that Mr Amis no longer needed her help and to leave his keys with me.

Years later, Martin told me that he went off to New York, came home to find chaos, and then sat in his flat for weeks in a rising tide of filth and dirty coffee cups before he realised the trick I had played on him.

His new girlfriend, Mary, was certainly not a domestic goddess and I doubt she sorted it out.

Nowadays, Martin is married to his second wife Isabel Fonseca, who is tolerant of Martin's exes (God knows, their social life would be limited if she wasn't), and they have come to dinner with me several times.

The evenings inevitably end with sentimental conversations about the past. I remember a line from one of his books which read: 'They all want to be the bitch in the book.'

Well this one didn't. Neither, while I was with him, did I think of myself as the girlfriend of a great writer. Although his use of language and his playfulness with it are positively pyrotechnical, I find much of his work rather dark and plot-free.

Today, I am single and perfectly happy to be so, and when I think back to those times we spent together, my enduring image of Martin is of him perched on a sofa, rolling up a cigarette and then beckoning me to come and play backgammon.

A crook of the finger, an engaging smile and I was there - at least until the next girl came along.

© Emma Soames

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Nice story....stuff happens and then we have our memories & dignity of sorts. I would LOVE your T-strap shoes (pictured aobve) from the 70's those are great!! If they sell them somewhere let me know...Hold your head up...more stuff to come in life.

- Theresa, Los Angeles, CA, 06/6/2009 08:39

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this is lame. move on, lady.

- marie, Santa Cruz, USA, 06/6/2009 07:16

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I am not sure what compelled me to read this in totality. It must be my abiding respect for Sir Winston. I kept hoping that either of the two would exhibit something that would elicit some interest. This was better left unsaid. It is boring.

- Patricia, Chicago, United States, 06/6/2009 04:15

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What a self-absorbed bore.

- Tracy Knoll, Phoenix, AZ, USA, 05/6/2009 23:52

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Sound like perfectly boring people,that were trying to be something they were not.

- Melanie, USA, 05/6/2009 22:00

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- hunter, Los Angeles, USA, 05/6/2009 21:59

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