



By the King's Design

Christine Trent

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Strong-willed Annabelle Stirling is more than capable of running the family draper shop after the untimely death of her parents. Under her father's tutelage, she became a talented cloth merchant, while her brother Wesley, the true heir, was busy philandering about Yorkshire. Knowing she must change with the times to survive, Belle installs new machinery that finishes twice the fabric in half the time it takes by hand. But not everyone is so enthusiastic.

Soon, riled up by Belle's competitors, the outmoded workers seek violent revenge. Her shop destroyed, Belle travels to London to seek redress from Parliament. While there, the Prince Regent, future King George IV, commissions her to provide fabrics for his Royal Pavilion. As Belle's renown spreads, she meets handsome cabinetmaker Putnam Boyce, but worries that marriage will mean sacrificing her now flourishing shop. And after Wesley plots to kidnap the newly-crowned King--whose indiscretions are surfacing--she finds herself entangled in a duplicitous world of shifting allegiances.

Painting a vivid portrait of life in the British Regency, Christine Trent spins a harrowing tale of ambition, vengeance, love, and complex loyalties against the dynamic backdrop of the early Industrial Revolution.

Praise for the novels of Christine Trent

"Marguerite is a strong heroine, and following her adventures is enjoyable. . . Readers interested in the battle of Trafalgar will find this retelling compelling." --"Publishers Weekly" on "A Royal Likeness"

"Readers are truly gifted with a wondrous portrait." --"Romantic Times" on "A Royal Likeness" (4 stars)

"Exuberant, sparkling, beguiling. . .brims with Dickensian gusto!" --Barbara Kyle, author of "The Queen's Lady" on "The Queen's Dollmaker"

"Winningly original. . .glittering with atmospheric detail!" --Leslie Carroll, author of "Royal Affairs" on "The Queen's Dollmaker"

By the King's Design Details

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From Reader Review By the King's Design for online ebook

Kelly A. says

I absolutely ADORE the early 19th century. It's one of my favorite periods of time for books and movies to be set in (hello? Jane Austen anybody?). One of the things I especially find interesting is the fashion. Ladies dresses were flowing, light, and easy to move about in. This is the era right before the big, stuffy dresses of the Victorian Age. Well, imagine how excited I was to read *By the King's Design*!

Our heroine, Annabelle (Belle) Stirling, is SO likeable and easy to root for. She has inherited and runs her family's drapery shop on her own, providing the best fabrics for dresses and furnishing to London's elite. Rising in fame, she becomes a draper in the building of the Prince Regent's (the future King George IV) new palace. Belle faces the difficulties of establishing her work as a woman and of course, there's a swoon-worthy man involved, even if he does have a giggle-inducing name (Putnam Boyce).

The one thing that irked me was Belle's brother, Wesley. He was a very charming man and the true owner of the shop, even though he let Belle run things on her own (a good decision). He had many problems and made horrible decisions, yet Belle never opened her eyes to this. She almost blindly followed and accepted him, even when it threatened her shop, reputation, and life. It was hard to see such a strong woman be dragged down by a weak man.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the history is what really made me love this book. The Luddites (people who strongly opposed the upcoming Industrial Revolution and sought out to destroy as much as they could) were one of my favorite parts. I wish we could've read more about George III, the 'Mad King,' as he is one of my favorite historical figures, but his son, the lavish prince, was good enough! The plot was fun, the characters well developed, and I can't wait to get my hands on Christine Trent's other books!

Carol says

'By the King's Design' by Christine Trent was the second book of hers that I have read.

There are a few drawbacks to this book that I want to get out of the way first. The pace of the book was uneven. It got off to a great start but then slowed down in the middle. The best part was the last third of the book. By then, the pace rose to breakneck speed. I would have preferred to have the middle shortened.

Also, I didn't like how the men seemed to be either so very good or so terribly bad. That didn't seem realistic.

The book opens in April 1812; there is a meeting of Luddites in Yorkshire, England. Not being familiar with that part of English history, I was confused. Who were the Luddites? I had never heard of King Ludd before. I stopped reading and went to get more information.

I was amazed at how very complicated it was to make cloth before the Industrial Revolution. There were so many steps and many different specialists at different cloth making jobs. With the mechanization of the process, the material wasn't of such good quality as before but the quantity of it increased great. Many specialists were shut out of their jobs.

I enjoyed being introduced to Annabelle aka Belle Stirling at the arrival of her new gig mill. She was very intelligent and inquisitive and fiercely loyal to her brother. She was too loyal for me to swallow. I didn't know why she keeps excusing her brother's bad behavior to herself. My patience would have run out much sooner. But I did love the rest of her character. She was so shrewd, honest, and hardworking and learned so fast. So once again I fell in love with the main character.

I did not like her brother, Wesley, at all. Even before he became a steady opium user, he just thought of himself and what he could get anyone for himself. The other male, Put, he was called, seemed just a little too forgiving and perfect.

Jane Austin paid a surprise visit in this book and now I understand more what her purpose was in writing her books. I really like her as a person. I would have liked more information about Beau Brummel to appear in this book as he was such a big influence on dress.

I recommend this historical fiction book to all those interested in the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the reign of the Regent King George and the importance of style to the well off and the royalty to this time period.

I received this book from the Member Giveaway of The Library Thing and that in no way influenced my review.

Christy English says

This one is excellent. I really enjoyed the details of the rise of industry in the midst of Regency England. So much upheaval and suffering was going on while the beau monde waltzed and while the Prince Regent built his elaborate palaces. Annabelle Stirling is a charming heroine with courage and quiet strength. She faces the world as it is and meets it on its own terms, while never compromising herself or her values. Not an easy feat when serving a corrupt prince.

Set during the time of the Industrial Revolution, *By the King's Design* tells the story of Annabelle Stirling, a courageous woman searching for a way to maintain her values and livelihood alone in a man's world. Torn between the proscribed role of a woman and the role of a draper, after the death of her parents, Annabelle must continue her father's legacy, doing the work he taught her to love. Caught between the expectations of others and the need to work for her own living, Annabelle begins to work for the Prince Regent while maintaining her own shop in London.

A tale of betrayal, love, and a woman's triumph, in *By the King's Design*, Christine Trent delves into the world of Regency England as it was, with all its upheavals and suffering. Historically fascinating, with characters who draw you in, this fine novel carries you back into the past. I highly recommend this book.

Siobian says

Machines are just beginning to edge skilled workers out of their trades, and England's fabric croppers are none too pleased about it. When Belle Stirling installs a new gig mill in her fabric shop to increase

production, she doesn't believe that anyone could protest what she does in her own business. The outraged croppers do take offense to it though, and they storm Belle's shop and destroy the machine sending Belle in a fury to London to complain to the government. After having difficulty making anyone take her seriously in Parliament, she is, surprisingly, summoned to visit the Prince Regent: the future King George IV. She charms the prince and becomes a draper for his new palace, ensuring a steady income for her new London shop and guaranteeing a long line of clients anxious to have the same fabrics the prince uses. Although all should be wonderful, it isn't. Something is wrong with her brother Wesley, who seems to be keeping secret after secret from her, and her commitment to her shop may keep her from making a commitment to a man she loves.

This novel had everything I love from Trent's books: a strong, capable female heroine who isn't afraid to stand up for herself, fascinating historical detail, and a wonderful romance that keeps you guessing on whether it will work out or not. Though I have never been all that interested by fabrics, *By the King's Design* made not only the process but the history behind fabric-making interesting. The main character, Belle, truly makes the book and I believe she is my favorite of Trent's characters thus far. Because she is angry about men destroying her shop, she marches to Parliament to do something about it. She always does what she feels is right and you really have to applaud her for it, even when it seems as though it may not be the best decision at the time. Another thing I love about Trent's books are the cameos that historical figures make in her books and I was so excited to see Jane Austen make an appearance. Though she only plays a small part, her personality shines through and she became one of my favorite characters. Another character I loved was Put, who cut a very dashing figure and was the kind of reliable man any girl would dream of but still had his faults which, to me, made him that much more interesting. Overall, this was a fantastic read and I will continue to read anything Christine Trent writes.

*Please note, I received a copy of this novel from the author in exchange for an honest review.

Romancing the Book says

Reviewed By~Ursula

Review Copy Provided By~Publisher

A sweeping, detailed and intricate story of debauchery, gluttony, murder, rebellion and the grandeur of the Regency time-period. Christine Trent does a wonderful job of detailing the time of the King's reign during such turmoil in the early 1800's; it doesn't help that the people don't care for the newly crowned King George IV. He is a gluttonous man that loves his mistresses almost as much as he loves his food and opulence.

Belle is a draper that moves from her hometown to demand justice from Parliament for not protecting the common people, herself included, from Luddites that destroy the new mills that are replacing human workers. Things don't work out as she hopes, but life does move on. Belle opens her own drapers shop, along with her brother for help. Even though her brother was involved with the Luddite attack on her mill, she loves him, so she forgives his involvement. The Luddite attack with lead by her fiance, so when she leaves behind her hometown, she leaves him behind as well.

Due to her fiance's betrayal, Belle closes herself off to the idea of dating or marriage...so when it comes to cabinetmaker Putnam Boyce, he has a hard road to go to break through her defenses.

Belle proves herself as the Prince Regent's draper, even though she was only granted the post due to the

Prince's 'interest' in her. Things are going well for Belle, except for her brothers decline into the world of opium and the influence of Mr. Thistlewood, a leader in the conspiracy to overthrow the Parliament and dethrone the King.

With ensuing turmoil, her brothers involvement revealed and vengeance aimed at Belle by someone she has never even met, Belle's life is once again turned upside down. Now she must try to save her brother's life and her livelihood...and ultimately, her life.

Author Christine Trent weaves in fact, fiction, grandeur and the hardships for the people of that time into a wonderful story of love, trust, betrayal, forgiveness and vindication. For those that love greatly detailed historical...this is a perfect book to pick up!

Laura says

This is the third book I read by historical novelist Christine Trent. Both *The Queen's Dollmaker* and *A Royal Likeness* were books that transported me back in history, making me see it through the eyes of strong heroines "with unusual professions", as the author puts it. Yes, this is what I love the most about Trent's books; the main characters are tradeswomen who somehow get involved in some way with real-life historical figures.

This time we meet Annabelle Stirling, an ambitious draper (a cloth merchant) who was trained by her father since childhood. After her parent's death, Belle runs her father's shop while Wesley, her irresponsible and wayward brother, has little interest in it. Circumstances lead Belle and Wesley to London, where Belle sets up a draper shop and starts over with some help from her brother. Belle comes under the patronage of Mr. Nash, the architect to the Prince Regent, who later becomes George IV, and she is privileged to assist with the decoration of the King's Royal Pavilion in Brighton.

The story is set at the brink of the Industrial Revolution, spanning almost ten years from 1812 to 1821. I must say, Trent once again brought history to life with the events of this time. As in her other novels I learned about two trades, this time: cloth manufacture and cabinetmaking. She also brought to life George IV so well as an obese, pompous, manipulative and selfish monarch that it was easy to see why he was so disliked by his subjects. Her descriptions of the places and historical figures were so alive that I could picture this novel as a movie.

Although Belle was a strong and intelligent woman there were times I just didn't understand her behaviour, especially vis-a-vis Wesley, who was involved in treason. She wanted to improve her relationship with him and yet she was so ambitious and strove to be her own woman that she was oblivious to her brother's actions (or refused to see them) and even pushed away the romantic and respectable advances of Putnam Boyce, a man who respected her trade and independence. Sometimes, I was frustrated with her. But she had a good heart, worked hard and generously helped the poor in times of great need. I also thought her last decision regarding her business was brilliant.

Trent included a few scenes with characters from her previous novels (Colette and Mme Tussaud) which I thought was fun. I wished Belle would have made friends with Colette earlier though, seeing that their shops were close to each other. And I would have liked Putnam's marriage proposal staged at a more appropriate time (other than right after Belle kills someone in self-defense--wasn't she in shock?) as it overshadowed the

fact that he finally gets the girl after trying for several years!

I loved reading the author's note at the end of the book that gave more details of all the historical figures included in this story. Trent is a meticulous history buff and her novels truly reflect this. I look forward to reading her next novel.

Oriana says

19th century, Yorkshire. Annabelle (Belle) Stirling was raised learning all about the wonderful world of drapers. After the loss of both her parents, Belle starts running the family draper shop all by herself, even if the owner is her brother, Wesley. The latter is a charming young man who isn't interested at all in the shop and lets his sister do whatever she thinks is best for the business.

My favourite moments in the first part of the story were the scenes during Belle's younger years learning all there is to know about drapers with her father, Fafa. They are full of tenderness and we can see what a wonderful and accomplished woman Belle is becoming.

After an incident at her shop, Belle leaves for London where she finally decides to stay and build a new life. Sometimes, I was a little surprised how quickly she landed on her feet. Maybe I was expecting a little more resistance from her peers because not only she was a woman and unmarried but mostly she was unknown in town without any connections. But, in the other hand, the girl knew her business quite well.

The only aspect of this story that pleased me the least was Belle's attitude in presence of her brother. I do understand that he was her only kin, but after so many problems and so many signs that something was really off, Belle remained, for a very long time, completely blind over her brother's doings. It was even more frustrating knowing that otherwise Belle was an intelligent, hard-working woman who valued her independence above all.

I have to say that Ms Trent has a real gift to create interesting heroes. Putnam Boyce stole every scene he was in. His calm, self-confidence and passion make it impossible not to fall head over heels for him. Each time Belle needed his help, he was there for her. The mutual admiration for their respective work was something that I could feel and really appreciate. Of course, Putnam is not without faults, and that makes him even more interesting.

The historical background was extremely captivating. I knew little about the Luddites and while I was reading *By The King's Design*, I excitedly searched all kind of informations about the movement. The attacks were described vividly, I could imagine without any difficulties the rage and the fear felt during the destruction of the new machines.

In the other hand, the Prince Regent is one of those royals that I never really cared for and therefore, except for his excesses, lovers and marriage with Caroline of Brunswick, my knowledge is quite limited. His reaction to Belle was surprising, but probably not unexpected given his changeable opinions and love for lovely women.

By The King's Design was a wonderful way to begin the new year !

Nikki says

This book holds a special place in my heart as my first giveaway win.

Pros:

By the King's Design is very well detailed and researched. It establishes a real sense of the time period and richly portrays the story against a backdrop of historical facts.

The beginning is excellent. It grabs your attention immediately and draws you into the world from the very start. Christine Trent has done a really great job with creating a cast of diverse, intriguing, and sympathetic characters to mingle with the big players of the past.

The end is, once again, quite interesting to read. It's even better and more exciting than the beginning. But, is it worth wading through the filler? I'm not so sure.

The last name Boyce is a variant of my own last name, Boyse, and as my father's family is from Britain, I found it entertaining to imagine the characters as distant relatives of a sort.

Wesley's plot and arc are unique and interesting ((view spoiler)), as is the initial set-up of the novel and Belle's occupation.

Cons:

The strength of the beginning contrasts so heavily with the slumping and tired middle that it's almost like reading a different book altogether. It drags its feet for much too long and shatters the plot pacing to pieces. This is why the book took me nearly half a year to read. Nothing happens for way too long.

Belle's determination, strength, and independence are to be admired, especially for someone in her time period. Although, I found her story arc to be conflicting and in the end, a bit irritating. (view spoiler)

Why does Put like Belle? She constantly does bizarre things around him, like cry and flail like a weirdo when he's just being friendly, and then blowing him off and being coldly cordial for no reason. I just didn't find their relationship believable, in that I would have assumed he'd look for someone a little less hysterical after awhile.

Some plot threads seem to fizzle and go nowhere. (view spoiler)

Verdict: A 2.5 star rating, mainly for the ending. The beginning and end are page-turners and will keep you reading long after you should, but the middle is boring and ultimately drags the rest of the book down. However, if drapery, fabrics, and/or early 1800's Britain are your passions, then this is a must read!

p.s. This line made me laugh and is the reason I think romance is silly: (view spoiler)

Kelsey says

Annabelle Stirling, a young craftswoman, finds herself marching towards London in hopes of finding aid from the Prince Regent after her draper shop is destroyed by the Luddites who had help from her now ex-fiancé Clive and her weak-minded brother, Wesley. With no help offered she is befriended by the architect, John Nash and encouraged to open up shop in London. Her brother slinks back into her life and because he is family, she allows him to work in her shop again.

Liking her spunk, the Prince Regent (King George IV) engages her services in decorating his Pavilion. Along the way she meets Putman Boyce, a cabinetmaker who holds promise in thawing Belle's frozen heart. But due her brother's inability to think for himself (probably due to his opium addiction) he has now embroiled them in a treasonous plot against the future King that ends him up in jail and Belle an outcast.

Trent throws us right into the riots caused by machines taking over jobs that were done by hand. The Luddites laid siege across the countryside destroying mills and shops that had these machines in them. On top of this there are families starving because they are out of work. Trent does not shy away from describing this misery and in fact makes it hit home for Belle when she stumbles upon her childhood friend and ex-fiancé (now married to each other) in starved condition. We also read about some very interested historical characters that Trent throws in, including Jane Austen who becomes an acquaintance with Belle.

Another piece that is thrown in is the Prince Regent's tumultuous marriage and his quest for a divorce. He has many mistresses that are all vying for attention. We see the greed and vanity that often comes with being a member of the royal family. My impression on the prince is that he was very spoiled and weak.

Love all the intrigue and I did find it an engaging read. Heavy on historical and light on romance leads this Regency story to contain a lot of information that at times could be overwhelming to follow. But as the story reaches its climax, the reader is fully vested and will not be able to stop reading.

(ARC was provided by publisher for an honest review)

Korey says

I appreciated how dense with historical information this is. I didn't know how much I wanted to read about rampaging Luddites until now. I just wish all the descriptive language and historical exposition was in service of a tight, well constructed plot. After a strong start the middle of this book drags so much I almost abandoned it. It picks up again in the end but I wish the middle third wasn't so meandering.

Sheree says

Set during the early 19th century Regency period, *By The King's Design* is a thoroughly engaging read with easily digestible historical details for those not too familiar with that period in history.

The Luddites, the burgeoning industrial revolution and subsequent social unrest, the Cato Street Conspiracy all made for really interesting reading and my education of the extra-curricular vices of the "*extra-corpulent ... extra-repulsive*" Prince Regent George Hanover were certainly expanded upon. Sadly, the future King

George IV was also well known for his extravagance in the face of England's starving and dying.

We follow our heroine Belle Sterling from Yorkshire to London where she sets up her own drapery shop, is taken under the wing of renowned architect John Nash and receives a lucrative commission from the Prince Regent to provide drapery for the new palace, Brighton Pavilion.

Belle is an endearing character, she's intelligent and hard-working but I did question her judgement where her brother Wesley was concerned. Wesley's a total sap, weak and flighty and I wanted to slap him, hard. Actually I wanted to slap Belle a few times too ... how many times did she have to be duped by her brother before coming to her senses.

The hero of the story and Belle's eventual romantic interest is Putnam Boyce, of "*Put rhymes with shut*" fame. Put is extremely likeable, a cabinet maker and true gentleman but Belle tries to hold him at arm's length while fiercely maintaining her independence, no easy feat for a woman in this era.

This was my first Christine Trent novel but it's safe to say it won't be my last.

Holly P says

3.5

I read across all time periods in historical fiction but I think the Regency period in England's history is probably one of the ones I've read the least about. I am glad that I got to remedy that with this delightful novel which begins as Luddites (those opposed to the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution) are menacing the English countryside and attacking merchants who are buying the new equipment that is replacing their jobs. Annabelle Sterling and her brother Wesley are victims of one such attack and when the spirited Annabelle realizes that those she trusted may have been behind it she goes to London to protest the law turning a blind eye to these miscreants and also to start her business anew. Unfortunately, Annabelle catches the eye of the Prince Regent- a man who is more interested in sporting the latest fashions than governing the country and while her association with the Prince Regent brings her a remarkable change in fortunes, she manages to glide right into the path of danger at every turn often with more than a little help from her brother Wesley.

What I love about Christine Trent's books are that she manages to combine a little known trade (this time cloth making) with a spunky heroine against a backdrop of rich historical detail for the period she writes about. I also like that her books have a lightness about them-managing to capture the nuances of the period and letting the drama the protagonist finds herself in unfold while still being a lot of fun to read.

While reading I did want to reach through the pages and shake some sense into Annabelle as her stubbornness and refusal to listen to anyone led her into yet another sticky situation. Our heroine experiences quite a lot of tragedy and misfortune throughout the book as well but even though she was a trouble magnet I admired her spirit. Bonus points for the several pages long author's note at the back giving a run down of the period and what was based in fact or fictionalized. I love when authors include this!

I sped right through this and then went to Barnes & Noble and grabbed *A Royal Likeness* which is the author's other book I hadn't read yet. Check this out if you like the Regency period or if like me, you want to read more about it but aren't quite sure where to start.

review copy for tour participation

Heather C says

This third outing from Christine Trent again brings us into the life of a young craftswoman - this time a draper. Belle Stirling has to push back against the opinion that a woman should not be in charge of a business as well as the undercurrents that are swirling around in society. Belle has to become her own woman and manage her own shop while also becoming one of the drapers who is working on the Prince Regents new pavilion.

This was my first Regency read and up until this point I wasn't even sure what that exactly meant. This was a great introduction for me as I felt that through Christine Trent's pen I was able to get to know the Prince Regent (and ultimately King George IV). I found out that I didn't really like him, although at the same time during the interactions he had with Belle he didn't seem quite so boorish. The issues that the Prince should have been facing were well detailed as were all of his mistresses and passions.

It is impossible to talk about *By the King's Design* without bringing comparisons to *A Royal Likeness* and *The Queen's Dollmaker*. I loved the nods to both of these books that the author included within this novel. Claudette Laurent has a small role in this book and a few of the events from *A Royal Likeness* are mentioned. It was a nice treat to the readers of these books. I didn't find Belle as compelling of a character as Claudette or Marguerite from her prior books. The two prior heroines were more street smart and their own women, while Belle seemed to rely on the men in her life too much for my liking. She seemed to be clueless to the things going on around her most of the time.

As for the other characters in this story – I really enjoyed Wesley, Belle's brother. He inherently finds trouble everywhere he goes and gets mixed up in some interesting situations. Put, the cabinet maker, was quite the gentleman who I think every girl would be happy with. There is also a famous author who makes her acquaintance with Belle and that was a great surprise. I will let you figure out who for yourself.

I love how Christine Trent includes some lesser known craft professions within her books – this time cabinetmaking and drapery. I found myself wishing for a few more details about the fabric shops and drapery while I felt comfortable with the amount of cabinetry information included.

Overall this was another enjoyable, quick, and compelling read from Christine Trent. I can't wait to see what she brings to us next.

This book was received for review from the author - I was not compensated for my opinions and the above is my honest review.

TJ says

The rating should probably be a little higher but just didn't warrant a 4 star. The cover is *beautiful*, though!

For a complete review, visit *Affaire de Coeur* magazine, hard copy or online at:
<http://www.adcmagazine.com/> February 2012 issue.

K says

This book was bizarre- like three different books shuffled together. There was a great deal of time spent on Prinny and his offenses; all of which were unnecessary to the main story. [also too descriptive and inappropriate] The author also went into a lot of detail about the Royal Pavilion, the Luddites, and other random historical tidbits. I would be hesitant to read another of the author's books, based on the hodge-podge style of this one.

Descriptions of Prinny's misbehavior border on "drop the book" inappropriate.

Descriptions of Luddite plans/behavior/punishments too graphic.
