



# I went in search of self, seduction and sex

**LOVE GODDESS:** Freya North, named after a Norse deity, has combined food and sex into an alluring recipe for her hit first novel and earned herself a tasty £200,000 deal

**F**REYA NORTH, 28, has just won the literary lottery. Publishers fought to buy her first novel, *Sally*, a feisty romp that helped her scoop £200,000 in a three-book deal.

She wrote much of it while on income support of £20 a week, researched extensively the scenes of rampant sex and bought Percy, a horse whom she rides daily in London, with her advance money.

Now, Freya is being mooted excitedly as the new author of the Nineties: the writer for the twenty-something generation, pioneering a new genre that leaves behind the fantastical worlds of Mesdames Joan and Jackie Collins, in favour of characters with whom we can identify — and lots of food.

Joan Collins killed off the s&f genre. Its successor is f&f fiction (as in food and f\*\*\*\*\*). Food, rather than shopping, now voguishly accompanies sex. Tiramisu, immortalised by Edwina Currie and eaten for breakfast by Freya's heroine, is now the favoured sex aid.

*Sally* is a jauntily written book about a 25-year-old primary school teacher from North London who reinvents herself as a femme fatale.

Richard, a handsome 35-year-old architect, is the unknowing target of Sally's master plan. At first, she ensnares him by becoming a Jackie Collins heroine. But then she has her come-uppance because he falls in love with her.

After the Jackie Collins-style sex, the heroine decides to pursue Erica Jong's *Zipless F\*\*\**. By the end of the book, Sally has had chicken pox, broken her leg, spiked her hair and forsaken Jackie Collins and Erica Jong for Rudyard Kipling. The book is about the search for self, seduction, sex and spots.

Freya's brother Dan read the first two chapters of the manuscript and warned: "Don't show it to Mum." When, finally, she did, her mother thought the sex scenes funny. "They're tongue-in-cheek, not smutty, hard-core scenes," says Freya.

She claims that the bedroom athletics are all anatomically possible, but denies that they're autobiographical. "My girlfriends couldn't

*Author who set publishers salivating tells Caroline Phillips how*

wait to bombard me with their raunchy scenarios," she says.

Freya found writing about sex unerotic, like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw. Her manuscript, initially, was rejected. One publisher dismissed the work summarily; one agent took the trouble to say she hated Freya's style; another publisher returned the pages with a diatribe which began, "You can't start a book like that"; and the last, a well-known publisher of women's fiction, simply posted it back with a rejection slip.

Eight months later, the same publisher bid breathlessly for Sally at auction. "They'd put it on their slush pile of unsolicited manuscripts, then returned it unread," explains Freya, laughing. "More fool them, they could have had it for a tenner."

Brazenly, Freya then sent her rejected, battered opus to Jonathan Lloyd at literary agent Curtis Brown, with some fabricated reviews from Germaine Greer, Marie Claire and *The Independent* on Sunday. "The Germaine Greer review was totally derogatory. It called the heroine (Sally Lomax) Sally Climax and said she was a daft girl," Jonathan signed her up.

**W**HEN the auction began, Jonathan would ring and tell Freya to sit down. "By the end of the week, he called and told me to lie down." After Freya was told the news, she was unable to sleep for three days. "Last week, the first time I saw a finished copy on the bookshop shelf, I walked out backwards and hyperventilated on the pavement."

Freya, named after the Nordic goddess of love, is pretty, with clear

skin, bright eyes and tumbling hair. She looks like a primary school teacher, in her print skirt and black jumper — the understated clothes of an academic — and is unaffected, cheerful and natural.

She was raised in St John's Wood, North London, and recalls a happy childhood. As a youngster, she thought her father was in "socks and chairs". She attended South Hampstead High School where she was naughty until the sixth form. Then she became a swot. And she penned a novel about teenage angst.

After Manchester University, she took an MA in History of Art at the Courtauld Institute.

**S**HE WENT to America for three months, to decide whether to do a PhD, and met her husband Brian half-way up a waterfall in Yosemite National Park. His opening line was: "Gosh, isn't it nice here after that crappy coach journey to get here?" It was friendship at first sight. Two years later, they had a whirlwind romance and married in a register office.

She began writing *Sally* four years ago. For six months she wrote while on the dole, surviving on pasta and raids on her parents' fridge. Then she was sent on a "depressing" careers workshop: "I was told I wouldn't be a very good mathematician."

Sally was set aside for three years while Freya temped as an archivist at the National Art Collections Fund and as a picture researcher for the publisher Virago.

These days, she writes from 7.30am until lunchtime, then rides Percy, the horse she bought with her advance, in North Finchley.

Publishers now seem to send out tasters of the foods mentioned in their books to influential people. With Sally, Heinemann delivered hampers and the message: "If you're wondering about the enclosed goodies, turn to Page 40 to find one of the most seductive meals ever."

"The Lomax legs are shaved and two stray hairs are tweezed from the bridge of her nose," reads my copy. Apparently, the Page 40 in question relates to the manuscript rather than the finished book.