

WOMAN OF THE WEEK
Rosemary Rogers
QUEEN OF THE GOTHICS

By LINDSY VAN GELDER

RAVEN-HAIRED, almond-eyed, chain-smoking Rosemary Rogers sat in her opulent Plaza suite drinking an ivory-white china cup of cafe-au-lait. From a wealthy, sheltered childhood in exotic Ceylon through two turbulent marriages to 10 years in the squalid depths of the typing pool, she had survived tears, torment and tempestuous passion in a journey that spanned three continents and had finally brought her here—to her throne as the reigning "paperback princess," the millionaire mistress of the "erotic Gothic." She opened her mouth—those sensual woman's lips that some gald should have belonged to a devil-mondaine, they so invited a man to crush them with cruel kisses—and the interview began.

Q. Do you consider yourself a feminist?
A. No, I consider myself a woman.

Rosemary Rogers is the author of "Sweet Savage Love," "Dark Fires," "The Wildest Heart," and the new "Wicked, Loving Lies," (which first printing of 2.5 million will reach more women than six issues of MS.) and her publicists have thoughtfully compiled some "suggested questions" for reporters to ask her. (Sample: "Take your heroine, you've led a storybook life. What led you to abandon the security of a wealthy marriage in Ceylon to seek adventure on your own?")

According to her press kit, Mrs. Rogers is detested by feminists because all of the sex scenes in her novels are rapes—which the heroines enjoy, multi-organically. Her male prototype, whom she herself pictures as a Clint Eastwood type, has been described as "completely dominating, showing no emotions, taking his women savagely, teaching them the sexual satisfaction of a woman."

However, Mrs. Rogers' own life—which included, incredibly enough, a real near-rape—would inspire most feminists not to hate her but to hustle her off to a consciousness-raising session.

She was born 42 years ago to Cyril and Barbara Janaze, Dutch-Portuguese settlers in Ceylon. Her father ran one of the leading private clubs in the colony, and Rosemary "was never allowed to go out without a chaperone. I was a dreamer, a bookworm."

She married young, "as an escape," to "a local hero; he was captain of the Ceylon rugby team and also a track star—he was known as the fastest man in Asia." Their sex life, alas, was lousy. "I was a virgin. His constant accusation was 'God, you're frigid!' I knew there were no frigid women, just clumsy men, because I'd read all the books. He was a slam-burn-ma'am type. And always flaunting his mistresses in my face."

Rosemary got a job—against her husband's wishes—then split for England, leaving her two young daughters with her parents, got a secretarial job and "because one of my uncles was a knight, I gravitated toward the jet set of London. I was dating a steel tycoon, who was married but had an ar-

rangement with his wife, and he wanted me to be his mistress, but I was still too old-fashioned." On the rebound she met an American serviceman named Rogers who became Husband No. Two.

"He was really rough, crude, direct. He used four-letter words; I'd never met anyone like that. I had an orgasm for the first time." However, "we had nothing to talk about. And after a while, I couldn't stand for him to touch me." He'd want sex at all odd hours, when I was just falling asleep at 2 a.m. after nursing the baby. Now in California, with two sons, she divorced again.

She wrote her first novel three years ago on her free evenings and lunch hours (she was a secretary for the Solano County Parks Dept. in Fairfield, Cal.); she sent off an unsolicited manuscript to Avon, which accepted it immediately.

Today you can find Rosemary Rogers' books on every drugstore rack. The formula is always the same: an exotic locale, a riches-to-rags-and-back-to-riches story line, sex and violence (plus violent sex), and style that favors fiery imagery. Passion is forever flaming, blazing, scaring, melting.

Mrs. Rogers' secret? "What a lot of women are looking for is more romance in their lives . . . The modern men now, they aren't that strong." Lots of women write her letters claiming that their sex lives improved dramatically after they made their husbands read Mrs. Rogers' books.

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And yet, she admits, her own rape-attempt experience had not a glimmer of sexual excitement. "It was total terror. I had always thought that if somebody tried to rape me, I'd just lie back, but I went wild. I nearly emasculated him"—by squeezing his testicles firmly, then taking advantage of his pain to flee. The man was a date, attractive enough that "I probably would have gone very willingly into the bedroom if he hadn't mauled me."

How, then, can she write books that perpetuate the idea that all women want to be raped, and that it's a delicious experience? "Oh, I put my own experience out of my mind," she said. "It's almost like it happened to someone else. You have to do that." And, she points out, some of her literary rapist-heroes have "a core of tenderness."

These days, Rosemary Rogers does more writing about sex than sex itself. "I'm finding it's more fun. I don't think a man like that is ever going to materialize for me. He never has. So I really enjoy writing about it."

