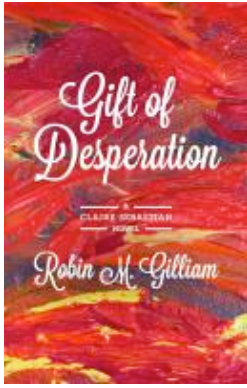




Gift of Desperation

— A —
CLAIRE SEBASTIAN
— NOVEL —

Robin M. Gilliam



Claire Sebastian leads a secret life. By day she is a junior curator at the NMWA in D.C., and by night she likes booze and hot, insatiable men. Tasked with curating a show entitled Art and Healing, Claire begins to face her past. And with the help of her childhood friend Evi, a wounded warrior who returns to D.C., Claire begins her journey of recovery from desperation to hope.

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A Claire Sebastian Novel

Robin M. Gilliam

Web of Life Art Studio

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Chapter One

As her eyes adjusted to the light sneaking in from the drawn blinds, Claire Sebastian realized she was in a strange room tangled in the arms of a naked, snoring man. She tried to sneak out of bed, but caught a whiff of his noxious breath—a mixture of stale beer and sex—and tumbled to the floor instead, taking the sheet with her. The man grumbled grabbing the pillow, let out a loud fart, and snuggled back into dream land.

As Claire found her footing, she threw the sheet on him. She then followed, “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction,” by the Rolling Stones to her purse where she found her buried cell phone. It was her best friend, Lexie, one of the “Four Amigos” from her college days.

“How was it? He was gorgeous!” Lexie screeched.

“Great,” Claire whispered; wishing she could remember. “But I can’t really talk now.”

“Oh, okay!” Lexie said, “I’ll call you later.”

Claire thought she might be sick as she searched for her *screw me now* outfit. First she scrambled into her peach silk bra and panties. Then she pulled on her tight aqua V neck t-shirt that revealed her ample cleavage. It made her shoulder-length, straight brown hair shine like honey, and turned her hazel eyes into the color of the Caribbean Sea.

The night started to crystallize in her mind as Claire shimmied into her skinny brown jeans that made her small butt pop just enough to say, *like the junk in my trunk?* The bridal shower—at the bar—the guy. He was gorgeous and he was talking to her! The anxiety about the bridal shower and being the last woman standing in the marriage arena was replaced by excitement for the attention, and the prospect of love. The drinks were strong, the music was loud, and he wanted her. Her!

What was his name? Michael, Mike, Mitch. Did they use a condom? *Jesus, what if she got pregnant, aids, or another sexually-transmitted disease?* Before she skulked out of the apartment, she stopped to look through his mail where she found it; his name was Mitch. She took a picture with her

phone and wrote a note with her name and number in case he wanted to reach her. She slid on her cowboy boots and left.

The bright sun temporarily blinded Claire. Looking for a taxi she began to search frantically in her purse. *Where was it?* She knew she put it in there before going out last night. The harder she looked, the more anxious she got, finding it difficult to breath. Her hand grabbed her wallet—*No!* Her Keys—*No!* Her Cellphone—*No! No! No!* As her hand felt the shiny cold metal, she breathed a sigh of relief and said out loud, “There you are!” The vodka she kept for emergencies.

What was the emergency? Oh yea, her head hurt, her eyes stung, and her coochy-coochy was sore. *Wow, what kind of sex did we have?* It was probably great sex if her privates hurt that much.

She took a good long pull from her flask, and within seconds she felt the warmth steal down her throat and across her chest—*ahhhh—much better.* It filled her up; energized her. *Forget the taxi,* she decided instead to walk to the metro and do her Sunday shopping.

At home, Tabitha, her cat was waiting for her. Claire unpacked her groceries, took a long, hot shower and relaxed for the rest of the day. She continued to nurse her hangover with vodka but was careful to drink only enough to take the

edge off; she didn't want to have a hangover for work tomorrow.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The next day Claire joined the morning workshop, leery but excited to see what lay in store for today. There were a few people this time. Ben and Cora returned everyone's collages and said that today they would spend an hour writing about what they saw.

When Claire opened her folder she was surprised and shocked to see the words "You Don't Own Me" pasted on top of her pictures. The words were from different articles and fonts but very plain to see.

Her hour of writing was exhilarating. The pen danced across the page like it had a life of its own, releasing pent up fears like wild horses released from a corral.

Ben noticed she was glowing and he hid a secret smile, for he could see the healing power of art. When they started yesterday he didn't know if there was a tragic event in her life or if she was just participating in the work assignment. But today he could tell by her face, that something positive happened from her creative writing assignment and that whatever it was would lose its hold on her, like it did for him.

Cora told the group that the next step for today's workshop was to talk about their experience from the two exercises they have done to date.

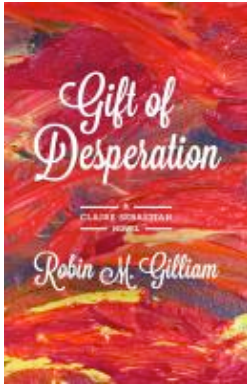
Cora continued, "I know how hard it is to talk about feelings that have been buried or confusing. You don't need to share specifics, but it would be helpful for the group to share some thoughts so that they can understand what the patrons who will join these workshops might go through." Everyone took their turn and revealed what they learned from the experience.

While Claire did not disclose any details, she was able to share with her co-workers that something had been bothering her for a long time and she felt a wonderful release. She also said that she was surprised to start to understand the true healing power of art. These exercises gave her a fresh

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perspective on her collection and what the artist actually experienced as she released herself onto her canvases.

With that, Claire headed off to work on her show.



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