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By Sarah Morgan

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Editorial Review

Review

'Lucas and Emma are a bewitchingly perfect pair in this heartfelt and masterful forbidden office romance.'

4.5* RT Book Reviews

About the Author

USA Today bestselling author Sarah Morgan writes lively, sexy stories for Harlequin Presents. RT Book Reviews has described her as 'a magician with words' and her books have been nominated for their Reviewer's Choice Awards and their Top Pick slot. In 2012 Sarah won the prestigious RITA® Award from the Romance Writers of America for her book Doukakis's Apprentice. Sarah lives near London with her husband and children who innocently provide an endless supply of authentic dialogue. Readers can find out more about Sarah and her books from her website sarahmorgan.com. She can also be found on Facebook and Twitter (@SarahMorgan_)

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It was the one night of the year he dreaded more than any other.

In the beginning he'd tried everything in a bid to escape it—wild parties, women, work—but he'd discovered that it didn't matter what he was doing or who he was doing it with, the pain remained the same. He chose to live his life in the present, but the past was part of him and he carried it everywhere. It was a memory that wouldn't fade. A scar that wouldn't heal. A pain that went bone-deep. There *was* no escape, which was why his favoured way of spending this particular night was to find somewhere he could be alone and get very, very drunk.

He'd driven the two hours from his office in London to the property he was restoring in rural Oxfordshire simply for the privilege of being alone. For once his phone was switched off, and it was staying that way.

Snow swirled in a crazy dance in front of the windscreen and visibility was down to almost zero. Huge white drifts were piled high at the side of the road, a trap for the nervous, inexperienced driver.

Lucas Jackson was neither nervous nor inexperienced and his mood was blacker than the weather.

The howl of the wind sounded like a child screaming and he clenched his jaw and tried to blot out the noise.

Never had the first glimpse of stone lions guarding the entrance to his estate been so welcome. Despite the conditions he barely slowed his pace, accelerating along the long drive that wound through acres of parkland towards the main house.

He drove past the lake, now frozen into a skating rink for the ducks, over the bridge that crossed the river and heralded the final approach to Chigworth Castle.

He waited to feel the rush of satisfaction that should have come from owning this, but as always there was nothing. It shouldn't have surprised him, he'd long since accepted that he wasn't able to feel in the way that other people did. He'd switched that part of himself off and he hadn't been able to switch it on again. What he did experience as he looked at the magnificent building was a detached appreciation for something that satisfied both the mathematician in him and the architect. The dimensions and structure were perfect. A gatehouse presided over the entrance, its carved stonework creating a first impression that was both imposing

and aesthetically pleasing. And then there was the castle itself, with its buff stonework and battlements that attracted the interest of historians from around the world. The knowledge that he was preserving history gave him a degree of professional pride, but as for the rest of it—the personal, emotional side—he felt nothing.

Whoever said that revenge was a dish best eaten cold had been wrong.

He'd sampled it and found it tasteless.

And tonight Lucas wasn't even interested in the historical significance of the house, just its isolation. It was miles from the nearest hint of civilisation and that suited him just fine. The last thing he wanted tonight was human contact.

Lights burned in a few of the upstairs windows and he frowned because he'd specifically instructed the staff to take the night off. He was in no mood for company of any description.

He drove over the bridge that spanned the moat, under the arch that guarded the entrance and skidded the last few metres into the courtyard, his tyres sending snow spinning into the air.

It occurred to him that if he hadn't left the office when he had, he might not have made it. He had staff capable of clearing the roads in the estate, but the approach to the house consisted of a network of winding country lanes that were a low priority for the authorities responsible for their upkeep. Briefly he thought of Emma, his loyal PA, who had stayed late at the office yet again in order to help him prepare for his coming trip to Zubran, an oil-rich state on the Persian Gulf. It was a good job she lived in London and wouldn't have far to travel home.

Abandoning the car to the weather, he strode across the snowy carpet and let himself in to the darkness of the entrance hall.

No housekeeper to greet him tonight. No staff. No one. Just him.

'Surprise!!' A chorus of voices erupted from around him and lights blazed.

Temporarily blinded, Lucas froze, shock holding him immobile on his own doorstep.

'Happy birthday to me!' Tara walked forward, a sway in her hips and a sly smile on her beautiful face as she hooked a finger inside his coat and lifted her scarlet painted mouth to his. 'I know you promised to give me my present next week, but I can't wait that long. I want it now.'

Lucas stared down into those famous blue eyes and still felt nothing.

Slowly, deliberately, he detached her hand from the front of his coat. 'What the hell,' he asked quietly, 'are you doing here?'

'Celebrating my birthday.' Clearly less than delighted with his chilly response, she produced her trademark pout. 'You refused to come to my party so I decided to bring the party to you. Your housekeeper let us in. Why haven't you ever invited me here before? I *love* this place. It's like a film set.'

Lucas lifted his gaze. He saw now that the grand hall with its magnificent paintings and tapestries had been decorated with streamers and balloons. Gaudily wrapped presents were stacked next to a large iced birthday cake. Open bottles of champagne stood on an antique table, mocking his black mood.

Never in his life had he felt less like celebrating.

His first thought was that he was going to fire his housekeeper, but then he remembered just how persuasive Tara could be when she wanted something. She was a master at manipulating emotions and he knew it frustrated her that she'd never succeeded in manipulating his.

'Tonight is not a good night for me. I told you that.' His voice sounded robotic but Tara simply shrugged dismissively.

'Well, whatever it is that is making you so moody, you need to snap out of it, Lucas. You'll forget about it once you've had a drink. We'll dance for a bit and then go upstairs and—'

'Get out.' His thickened command was greeted with appalled silence. Her friends—people he didn't know and had no desire to know—murmured their shock.

The only person who seemed unaffected by his response was Tara herself whose ego was the least fragile thing about her. 'Don't be ridiculous, Lucas. You don't mean that. It's a surprise party.'

But the surprise, apparently, was his. *Only Tara could hold a surprise party for her own birthday.* 'Get out and take your friends with you.'

Her eyes hardened. 'We all came by coach and it isn't coming back until one o'clock.'

'When did you last look outside? Nothing is going to be moving on these roads by one o'clock. That coach had better be here in the next ten minutes or you'll be snowed in. And trust me, you do *not* want that.' Perhaps it was his tone, perhaps it was the fact that he looked dangerous—and he knew that he must look dangerous because he *felt* dangerous—but his words finally sank home.

Tara's beautiful face, that same face that had graced so many magazine covers, turned scarlet with humiliation and anger. Those cat-like eyes flashed into his, but what she saw there must have scared her because the colour fled from her cheeks and left her flawless skin as pale as the winter snow blanketing the ground outside.

'Fine.' Her lips barely moved. 'We'll take our party elsewhere and leave you alone with your horrid temper for company. Now I know why your relationships don't last. Money, brains and skill in bed can't make up for the fact that you don't have a heart, Lucas Jackson.'

He could have told her the truth. He could have told her that his heart, once intact and fully functioning, had been damaged beyond repair. He could have told her that the phrase 'time heals' was false and that he was living proof that damage could be permanent. He could have described the relief that came from knowing he might never be healed because a heart already damaged could never be damaged again.

There was something beating in his chest, that was true, but it did nothing more than pump blood around his body, enabling him to get out of bed in the morning and go to work every day.

He could have told Tara all of that but she would have gained as little satisfaction in the listening as he would in the telling, so he simply strode past her towards the famous oak staircase that rose majestically from the centre of the hall.

Tonight the proportions and design gave him no satisfaction. The staircase was merely a means to escape from the people who had invaded his sanctuary.

Without waiting for them to leave, he took the stairs two at a time and strode towards his bedroom in the tower that overlooked the moat.

He didn't care that he'd shocked them.

He didn't care that he'd ended yet another relationship.

All he cared about was getting through this one night.

He was a cold-hearted, driven workaholic.

Her normal patience nowhere to be found, Emma struggled to keep the car on the road. It was Friday night and she should have been at home relaxing with Jamie. Instead, she was chasing her boss round the English countryside. After the week she'd had it was the last thing she needed. She had a *life*, for goodness' sake. Or rather, she would have liked to have a life. Unfortunately for her, she worked for a man for whom the concept of a life outside work didn't exist.

Lucas Jackson didn't have any emotional attachments and clearly didn't think his staff should have them either. He wasn't interested in her as a person, just in her contribution to his company. And there would have been no point in explaining her feelings because, as far as she could tell, he didn't have feelings. His life was so far removed from hers that sometimes when she drove into her space in the car park beneath the iconic glass building...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Katherine Sorenson:

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Sharron Marty:

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