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By Sarah Morgan

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Editorial Review

About the Author

USA Today bestselling author Sarah Morgan writes hot, happy contemporary romance. Her trademark humour and sensuality have gained her fans across the globe and two RITA(R) Awards from the Romance Writers of America. Sarah lives near London with her family. Visit her at www.sarahmorgan.com

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"LIBBY, you're up for auction. Lot number 16."

Libby snuggled the tiny baby in the crook of her arm and glanced up at the ward sister in horror. "Tell me you're joking."

"Deadly serious." Beverley squinted down at the baby. "How's she doing?"

"Better. I'm trying to get her to take more fluids," Libby said softly, reaching for the bottle of milk that she'd warmed in readiness. "And, Bev, I'm not taking part in the auction—I already told you that."

"You have to!" The older woman sat down in the chair next to her and gave her a pleading look. "You're the best-looking woman in the hospital. We're bound to get a good price for you."

Libby pulled a face. "That's so sexist!" "But true." Bev beamed at her. "Come on. Say yes. It's for a good cause."

"It's utterly degrading and I don't know what made you come up with the idea. You obviously have a sick mind."

"It was *your* idea," Bev reminded her placidly. "But that was before you went off men again. Everyone's really entered into the spirit of things. It's going to be a great evening and we're going to raise a fortune for our playroom. This is going to be the best-equipped paediatric ward in the world."

"Well, I must have been mad to think of it and I'm certainly not taking part. I'll give you a donation." Libby gently placed the bottle to the baby's lips. "Come on, sweetheart, suck for Libby."

"That's not the same. It's not just about the money, it's about team spirit and you have to be there. You're an important part of the paediatric team. My star performer, in fact."

"In that case I'll come and watch." Libby smiled with satisfaction as the baby clamped her mouth round the teat. "There's a good girl."

"We need you on that stage," Bev said firmly, "and just think of the opportunity to meet a new man! There'll be all sorts there. Short ones, tall ones, thin ones, fat ones..."

A new man?

Libby shuddered. "It doesn't matter what they look like on the outside. They're all the same on the inside and I'm not interested."

She'd given up on men totally. There was only so much hurt and disillusionment that a girl could stand.

Bev shifted uncomfortably. "You have to. It's tomorrow night! They've printed the programmes and you're in it."

"Oh, for crying out loud!" Libby glared at her colleague, who looked sheepish.

"It'll be fun," she said lamely. "A tall, handsome stranger will pay money for you. It's just a blind date really."

"I don't do dates," Libby said flatly, "blind or otherwise." The way she felt at the moment, she had no intention of ever dating a man again.

"Well, you could do the choosing," Bev suggested helpfully. "It's not as if you're short of money. You could use some of that enormous trust fund that Daddy set up for you to purchase a really hot date."

Libby shot her a look that spoke volumes. "Do I look stupid?"

"Libby." Bev spoke with exaggerated patience. "You're twenty-nine years old and you're loaded. You shouldn't be single. At the very least, some man should be trying to marry you for your money."

"Great. So now I'm up for sale to the highest bidder." Libby looked at her friend in exasperation. "What's wrong with being single? Women are allowed to be on their own these days. Being single is perfectly acceptable."

"For some people, maybe," Bev conceded, "but not you. You adore children. Children adore you. You're cuddly and loving and fun. You were designed to be married and a mother."

"The good thing about being a paediatric nurse," Libby observed, "is that you can enjoy the benefits of children without the drawbacks of a man."

Bev sighed. "Look, I know you haven't exactly had good experiences with men, but—"

"Good experiences?" Libby gave a laugh that was totally lacking in humour and then lowered her voice as the baby shifted restlessly in her arms. "Bev, do I need to spell out just how utterly ridiculous I feel after what happened with Philip?"

Bev bit her lip. "No. But you shouldn't feel ridiculous. You didn't do anything wrong."

"I dated a married man," Libby said shortly, and Bev frowned.

"But you didn't *know* he was married." "Not until I found him in bed with his wife," Libby agreed. "That sort of gave the game away really."

Bev closed her eyes. "I know you're hurt, but it wasn't your fault—"

"Of course it was. I was too trusting. He didn't mention a wife so I assumed he didn't have one. Silly me." Libby struggled with a lump in her throat, cross with herself for becoming upset again. She'd promised herself that she wasn't going to waste another tear on Philip and here she was with a wobbly lip again. Pathetic! "I am obviously totally incapable of spotting a rat so it's safer if I just stay single. So you can forget your auction. There's no way I'm ever voluntarily going on a date again."

Bev cleared her throat delicately. "You've got to have a social life, Libby. What about the summer ball next month? You need a partner."

"I'm not going to the summer ball." Libby concentrated on the baby. "I've decided to dedicate my life to work and forget about romance."

Bev's eyes widened. "You're not going to the ball? It's *the* event of the hospital calendar. If you don't go, Philip will assume that you're pining."

"And if I do go, and he's there, then there'll be bloodshed," Libby predicted darkly, adjusting the angle of the bottle slightly. "He's a total rat. I've discovered that the better-looking the man, the higher the rat factor."

Bev blinked. "Rat factor?" "Yes. It's my official measurement of male behaviour." Bev giggled. "We shouldn't be having this conversation in front of the baby," she murmured. "She's only four months old. We'll shock her."

"It's never too soon to learn about the rat factor," Libby murmured. "She'll have a head start on me. I was grown up before I discovered the truth."

Actually, that wasn't strictly true, she reflected, watching as the baby guzzled the rest of the bottle. She'd had endless clues during her childhood.

"Men should come with a government health warning." "Not all men," Bev said quietly, looking across the darkened ward at one of the fathers who sat slumped in a chair by a sleeping child. "He's going to be with her for the rest of the night and he's going to have to do a full day's work tomorrow."

"Yeah..." Libby followed her gaze. "Dave is a saint. And Poppy is lucky to have such a devoted dad. But he's the exception. The rest of them are creeps."

Poppy had cystic fibrosis and she'd developed yet another lung infection that required her to be back in hospital for treatment. She was well known on the ward and so was her father who never left her side.

Bev wasn't listening. "If you wore something short and left your hair loose, you'd make us a fortune. If we hit our target it's going to mean a fantastic playroom for our children. Toys, desks, books by the million, a whiteboard for the teacher. It's just a bit of fun. *Please*, Libby..."

Libby opened her mouth to refuse again and then closed it with a resigned sigh.

It *had* been her idea so people would expect her to be there. But if she attended then she'd have to take part and she really, *really* didn't want to expose herself to an evening with a man.

Or give philandering Philip the opportunity to buy her and force the conversation she'd been avoiding.

Perhaps she could put such a high price on herself that no one would be able to afford her, she mused.

She continued to search for solutions as she eased the teat out of the baby's mouth and lifted her against her shoulder. The baby snuffled contentedly and Libby smiled, breathing in her warm baby smell and cuddling her closer. And suddenly the answer came to her. Her *brother* could buy her. Why hadn't she thought of it sooner?

"All right, I'll do it." Libby smiled, pleased with her idea. "Alex can buy me. At least that should ensure that no one else does."

Especially Philip.

Ever since she'd arrived at Philip's flat unannounced and surprised him in a very compromising position with a stunning blonde who had turned out to be his wife—a wife he'd never thought to mention—Philip had been desperately trying to get to see her. He'd called her mobile so often that she'd finally switched it off and told her friends to call her on the ward. At least Bella, the receptionist, could field her calls.

She absolutely did not want a conversation with him about what had happened.

As far as she was concerned, there was nothing to talk about.

The man was married. And he'd lied to her. "Did you manage to get any extra help for tomorrow?" She knew that the staffing situation was dire.

Bev shook her head gloomily. "The nursing situation is bad, but fortunately the new consultant starts on Monday so at least we should finally have some more medical support."

Libby nodded. They'd been a consultant short and that had put tremendous pressure on everyone.

"I'll come in early tomorrow," she offered, and Bev bit her lip.

"I can't ask you to do that, you've worked a double shift today..."

"You didn't ask. I volunteered." Bev leaned forward and gave her a hug. "You're brilliant, and if I were a man I'd definitely buy you."

"And then you'd go home and sleep with a woman who turns out to be a wife that you conveniently forgot to mention," Libby said dryly. "So tell me—is the new consultant a woman or a rat?"

Bev laughed. "He's a man, if that's what you're asking." "Oh well, you can't have everything." With a wistful smile Libby stroked the baby's smooth cheek and then laid her carefully back in her cot, tucking the sheet around her.

The baby was so beautiful. It made her terribly broody, caring for her, and she would have loved one of her own.

It was just a shame that having a baby required contact with a man.

Less than twenty-four hours later, Andreas Christakos strolled onto the ward, six feet three of broad-shouldered, drop-dead-handsome Greek male.

The night sister, confronted by this unexpected vision of raw, masculine virility, dropped the pile of sheets she was carrying and lost her powers of speech.

Acknowledging that it probably hadn't been quite fair of him to arrive unannounced, Andreas extended a lean, bronzed hand and introduced himself.

The night sister paled slightly. "You're the new consultant? We weren't exactly expecting you..." She stooped to pick up the sheets, visibly flustered by his unscheduled appearance. "Did you want to see—? I mean, it seems a little late—"

"I merely came to familiarise myself with the whereabouts of the ward," he assured her smoothly, his eyes

flickering over the walls which were covered in brightly coloured children's paintings. "I don't officially start until Monday."

She clutched the sheets to her chest and looked relieved. "That's what I thought. Good. Well, please, help yourself to the notes trolley—they're all there and any X-rays are underneath. We're pretty quiet for once, so everyone's slipped off to the auction," the night sister told him. "They'll be back when it finishes—or sooner if I call them."

"Auction?" Andreas frowned as he repeated the word. He'd always thought his English was fluent but he found himself very unsure about what she was describing. Surely an auction involved paintings or other valuable artefacts?

"We're selling a date with each member of staff to raise money to buy equipment for our new playroom."

Andreas, traditional and Greek to the very backbone, struggled with this concept. They were selling *dates*?

Aware that she was waiting for some sort of response, he dealt her a sizzling smile. "It sounds like a novel way to raise money."

"It is." She looked at him for a moment and then smiled cheekily, her nervousness vanishing. "You're very good-looking. Perhaps you should consider auctioning yourself."

The smile froze on his face. "I don't think so." He had enough trouble keeping women at a distance as it was, and the one thing he absolutely didn't need was to offer himself to the highest bidder. The thought made him shudder. What sort of woman would that attract? Not the one he was searching for, that was for sure. Recent events had confirmed his growing suspicion that the woman he wanted didn't exist in real life.

"Are you sure I can't persuade you?" The night sister giggled. "You'd make us a fortune! Well, just in case you change your mind, it's all happening in the doctors' bar in the basement. You could go and meet everyone. Half the hospital will be there. Introduce yourself. Buy yourself a date for the evening!"

Knowing that he had no intention of doing anything of the sort, Andreas merely smiled politely and reached for the first set of notes.

As he flicked to the first page, he reflected on the strange ways of the English. Like most of his countrymen, he was aware of the outlandish behaviour shown by some of the English girls who holidayed in Greece, but in all his time in various English hospitals he'd never come across a scenario where staff sold themselves to raise money.

Was the NHS really in that much trouble? With a slight lift of his wide shoulders he dismissed the thought and proceeded to read the notes on each child, his sharp brain absorbing the information and filing it away for later.

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