



Nine Months to Redeem Him (One Night With Consequences Series Book 6)

By Jennie Lucas

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"This is all I can give you," he said. "Do you agree?"

"Yes," I whispered, my lips brushing against his. I hardly knew what I was saying. I could think of nothing other than the darkly powerful Edward St. Cyr. I was too lost in the moment, lost in pleasure that made the world a million colors of twisting light.

I gave him my body, which he wanted, and my heart, which he didn't. Had I just made the biggest mistake of my life? Maybe when he knows about our baby it will heal his wounded heart, so he can love us both...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jennie Lucas's parents owned a bookstore and she grew up surrounded by books, dreaming about faraway lands. At twenty-two she met her future husband and after their marriage, she graduated from university with a degree in English. She started writing books a year later. Jennie won the Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart contest in 2005 and hasn't looked back since. Visit Jennie's website at: www.jennielucas.com

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I WAS DYING.

After hours of being cooped up in the backseat of the chauffeured car, with the heat at full blast as the driver exceeded speed limits at every opportunity, the air felt oppressively hot. I rolled down the window to take a deep breath of fresh air and rain.

"You'll catch your death," the driver said sourly from the front. Almost the first words he'd spoken since he'd collected me from Heathrow.

"I need some fresh air," I said apologetically.

He snorted, then mumbled something under his breath. Pasting a smile on my face, I looked out the window. Jagged hills cast a dark shadow over the lonely road, surrounded by a bleak moor drenched in thick wet mist. Cornwall was beautiful, like a dream. I'd come to the far side of the world. Which was what I'd wanted, wasn't it?

In the twilight, the black silhouette of a distant crag looked like a ghostly castle, delineated against the red sun shimmering over the sea. I could almost hear the clang of swords from long-ago battles, hear the roar of bloodthirsty Saxons and Celts.

"Penryth Hall, miss." The driver's gruff voice was barely audible over the wind and rain. "Up ahead."

Penryth Hall? With an intake of breath, I looked back at the distant crag. It wasn't my imagination or a trick of mist. A castle was really there, illuminated by scattered lights, reflecting in a ghostly blur upon the dark scarlet sea.

As we drew closer, I squinted at the crenellated battlements. The place looked barely habitable, fit only for vampires or ghosts. For this, I'd left the sunshine and roses of California.

Blinking hard, I leaned back against the leather seat and exhaled, trying to steady my trembling hands. The smell of rain masked the sweet, slightly putrid scent of rotting autumn leaves, decaying fish and the salt of the ocean.

"For lord's sake, miss, if you've had enough of the rain, up it goes."

The driver pressed a button, and my window closed, choking off fresh air as the SUV bumped over ridges in the road. With a lump in my throat, I looked down at the book still open in my lap. In the growing darkness,

the words were smudges upon shadows. Regretfully, I marked my place, and closed the cover of *Private Nursing: How to Care for a Patient in His Home Whilst Maintaining Professional Distance and Avoiding Immoral Advances from Your Employer* before placing it carefully in my handbag.

I'd already read it twice on the flight from Los Angeles. There hadn't been much published lately about how to live on a reclusive tycoon's estate and help him rehabilitate an injury as his live-in physical therapist. The closest I'd been able to find was a tattered book I'd bought secondhand that had been published in England in 1959—and when I looked closer I discovered it was actually a reprint from 1910. But I figured it was close enough. I was confident I could take the book's advice. I could learn anything from a book.

It was *people* I often found completely unfathomable.

For the twentieth time, I wondered about my new employer. Was he elderly, feeble, infirm? And why had he sent for me from six thousand miles away? The L.A. employment agency had not been very forthcoming with details.

"A wealthy British tycoon," the recruiter had told me. "Injured in a car accident two months ago. He can walk but barely. He requested you."

"Why? Does he know me?" My voice trembled. "Or my stepsister?"

Shrug. "The request came from a London agency. Apparently he found the physical therapists in England unsuitable."

I gave an incredulous laugh. "All of them?"

"That's all I'm allowed to share, other than salary details. *That* is sizeable. But you must sign a nondisclosure agreement. And agree to live at his estate indefinitely."

I never would have agreed to a job like this three weeks ago. A lot had changed since then. Everything I'd thought I could count on had fallen apart.

The Range Rover picked up speed as we neared the castle on the edge of the ocean's cliff. Passing beneath a wrought iron gate carved into the shape of sea serpents and clinging vines, we entered a courtyard. The vehicle stopped. Gray stone walls pressing in upon all sides, beneath the gray rain.

For a moment, I sat still, clutching my handbag in my lap.

"Consider a carpet," I whispered to myself, quoting Mrs. Warreldy-Gribbley, the author of the book. "Be silent and deferential and endure, and expect to be trod upon."

I could do that. Surely, I could do that. How hard could it be, to remain silent and deferential and endure?

The SUV's door opened. A large umbrella appeared, held by an elderly woman. "Miss Maywood?" She sniffed. "Took you long enough."

"Urn..."

"I'm Mrs. MacWhirter, the housekeeper," she said, as two men got my suitcase. "This way, if you please."

"Thank you." As I stepped out of the car, I looked up at the moss-laden castle. It was the first of November. This close up, Penryth Hall looked even more haunted. *A good place to heal*, I told myself firmly. But that was a lie. It was a place to hide.

I shivered as drops of cold rain ran down my hair and jacket. Ahead of me, the housekeeper waved the umbrella with a scowl.

"Miss Maywood?"

"Sorry." Stepping forward, I gave her an attempt at a smile. "Please call me Diana."

She looked disapprovingly at my smile. "The master's been expecting you for ages."

"*Master...*" I snorted at the word, then saw her humorless expression and straightened with a cough. "Oh. Right. I'm terribly sorry. My plane was late."

She shook her head, as if to show what she thought of airlines' lackluster schedules. "Mr. St. Cyr requested you be brought to his study immediately."

"Mr. St. Cyr? That is his name? The elderly gentleman?"

Her eyes goggled at the word *elderly*. "Edward St. Cyr is his name, yes." She looked at me, as if wondering what kind of idiot would agree to work for a man whose name she did not know. A question I was asking myself at the moment. "This way."

I followed, feeling wet and cold and tired and grumpy. *Master*, I thought, irritated. What was this, *Wuthering Heights*?— The original novel, I mean, not the (very loosely) adapted teleplay that my stepfather had turned into a cable television miniseries last year, with a pouty-lipped starlet as Cathy, and so much raunchy sex that Emily Bronte was probably still turning in her grave. But the show had been a big hit, which just went to show that maybe I was every bit as naïve as Howard claimed. "Wake up and smell the coffee, kitten," he'd said kindly. "Sex is what people care about. Sex and money."

I'd disagreed vehemently, but I'd been wrong. Clearly. Because here I was, six thousand miles from home, alone in a strange castle.

But even here, between the old suits of armor and tapestries, I saw a sleek modern laptop on a table. I'd purposefully left my phone and tablet in Beverly Hills, to escape it all. But it seemed even here, I couldn't completely get away. A bead of sweat lifted to my forehead. I wouldn't look to see what they were doing, I *wouldn't...*

"In here, miss." Mrs. MacWhirter led me into a starkly masculine study, with dark wood furnishings and a fire in the fireplace. I braced myself to face an elderly, infirm, probably cranky old gentleman. But there was no one. Frowning, I turned back to the housekeeper.

"Where is—"

She was gone. I was alone in the flickering shadows of the study. I was turning to leave as well when I heard a low voice, spoken from the depths of the darkness.

"Come forward."

Jumping, I looked around me more carefully. A large sheepdog was sitting on a Turkish rug in front of the fire. He was huge and furry, and panting noisily, his tongue hanging out. He tilted his head at me.

I stared back in consternation.

Was I having some kind of breakdown, as my friend Kristin had predicted? I *had* seen enough funny pet videos online to know that animals could be trained to talk.

"Um." Feeling foolish, I licked my lips. "Did you say something?"

"Did I stutter?" The dog's mouth didn't move. So it wasn't the dog talking. But now I wished it had been. Animal voices were preferable to ghostly ones. Shivering, I looked around me.

"Do you require some kind of instruction, Miss May-wood?" The voice turned acid. "An engraved invitation, perhaps? Come forward, I said. I want to see you."

It was then I realized the deep voice didn't come from beyond the grave, but from the depths of the high-backed leather chair in front of the fire. Oh. Cheeks hot, I walked toward it. The dog gave me a pitying glance, tempered by the faint wag of his tail. Giving the dog a weak smile, I turned to face my new employer.

And froze.

Edward St. Cyr was neither elderly nor infirm. No.

The man who sat in the high-backed chair was handsome, powerful. His muscled body was partially immobilized, but he somehow radiated strength, even danger. Like a fierce tiger—caged...

"You are too kind," the man said sardonically.

"You are Edward St. Cyr?" I whispered, unable to look away. I swallowed. "My new employer?"

"That," he said coldly, "should be obvious."

His face was hard-edged, rugged, too much so for conventional masculine beauty. There was nothing *pretty* about him. His jawline was square, and his aquiline nose slightly off-kilter at top, as if it had once been broken. His shoulders were broad, barely contained by the oversized chair, his right arm hung in an elastic brace in a sling. His left leg was held out stiffly, extended from his body, the heel resting on a stool. He looked like a fighter, a bouncer, maybe even a thug.

Until you looked at his eyes. An improbable blue against his olive-toned skin, they were the color of a midnight ocean swept with moonlight. Tortured eyes with unfathomable depths, blue as an ancient glacier newly risen above an arctic sea.

Even more trapped than his body, I thought suddenly. His soul.

Then his expression shuttered, turning sardonic and flat, reflecting only the glowing embers of the fire. Now

his blue eyes seemed only ruthless and cynical. Had I imagined the emotion I'd seen? Then my lips parted.

"Wait," I breathed. "I know you. Don't I?"

"We met once, at your sister's party last June." His cruel, sensual lips curved. "I'm so pleased you remember."

"Madison is my stepsister," I corrected automatically. I came closer to the chair, in the flickering light of the fire. "You were so rude."

His eyes met mine. "But was I wrong?"

My cheeks burned. I'd been working as Madison's new assistant, so had been obligated to attend her posh, catered party. There'd been a DJ and waiters, and a hundred industry types—actors, directors, wealthy would-be producers. Normally I would have wanted to run and hide. But this time, I'd been excited to bring my new boyfriend. I'd been so proud to introduce Jason to Madison. Then, later, I'd found myself watching the two of them, across the room.

A sardonic British voice had spoken behind me. "*He's going to dump you for her.*"

I'd whirled around to see a darkly handsome man with cold blue eyes. "*Excuse me?*"

"I saw you come in together. Just trying to save you some pain." He lifted his martini glass in mocking salute. "You can't compete with her, and you know it."

It had been a dagger in my heart.

You can't compete with her, and you know it. Blonde and impossibly beautiful, my stepsister, who was one year younger, drew men like bees to a honeypot. But I'd seen the downside, too. Even being the most beautiful woman in the world didn't guarantee happiness.

Of course, being the ugly stepsister didn't guarantee it either. I'd glared at the man before I turned on my heel. "*You don't know what you're talking about.*"

But somehow, he *had* known. It haunted me later. How had some rude stranger at a party seen the truth immediately, while it had taken me months?

When Madison arranged for Jason to get a part in her next movie, he'd been thrilled. Working as Madison's assistant, I'd seen them both every day on set in Paris. Then she'd asked me to go back to L.A. and give a magazine a personal tour of Madison's house in the Hollywood Hills, and talk about what it was like to be a "girl next door" who happened to have Madison Lowe as my stepsister, a semifamous producer as my stepfather, and up-and-coming hunk Jason Black as my boyfriend. "We need the publicity," Madison had insisted.

But the reporter barely seemed to listen as I walked her through Madison's lavish house, talking lamely about my stepsister and Jason. Until she pressed on her earpiece with her hand and suddenly laughed aloud, turning to me with a malicious gleam in her eye. "*Fascinating. But are you interested in seeing what the two of them have been up to today in Paris?*" Then she'd cut to reveal live footage of the two of them naked and drunk beneath the Eiffel Tower.

The video became an international sensation, along with the clip of my stupid, shocked face as I watched it.

For the past three weeks, I'd been trapped behind the gates of my stepfather's house, ducking paparazzi who wanted pictures of my miserable face, and gossip reporters who kept yelling questions like, "*Was it a publicity stunt, Diana? How else could anyone be so stupid and blind?*"

I'd fled to Cornwall to escape.

But Edward St. Cyr already knew about it. He'd even tried to warn me, but I hadn't listened.

Looking at my new employer now, a shiver went through me, rumbling all the way to my heart, shaking me like the earthquakes I thought I'd left behind. "Is that why you hired me? To gloat?"

Edward looked at me coldly. "No."

"Then you felt sorry for me."

"This isn't about *you*." His dark blue eyes glittered in the firelight. "This is about me. I need a good physiotherapist. The *best*."

Confused, I shook my head. "There must be hundreds, thousands, of good physical therapists in the U.K...."

"I gave up after four," he said acidly. "The first was useless. I hardly know which was thicker, her skull or her graceless hands pushing at me. She quit when I attempted to give her a gentle bit of constructive criticism."

"*Gentle?*"

"The second woman was giggly and useless. I sacked her the second day, when I caught her on the phone trying to sell my story to the press."

"Why would the press want your story? Weren't you in a car accident?"

His lips tightened almost imperceptibly at the corners. "The details have been kept out of the news and I intend to keep it that way."

"Lucky," I said, thinking of my own media onslaught.

His dark eyes gleamed. "I suppose you're right." He glanced down at his arm in the sling, at his leg propped up in front of him. "I can walk now, but only with a cane. That's why I sent for you. Make me better."

"What happened to the other two?"

"The other two what?"

"You said you hired four physical therapists."

"Oh. The third was a hatchet-faced martinet." He shrugged. "Just looking at her curdled my will to live."

Surreptitiously, I glanced down at my damp cotton jacket, sensible nursing clogs and baggy khakis wrinkled from the overnight flight, wondering if at the moment, I too was curdling his will to live. But my looks weren't supposed to matter. Not in physical therapy. Looking up, I set my jaw. "And the fourth?"

"Ah. Well." His lips quirked at the edges. "One night, we shared a little too much wine, and found ourselves in bed in a totally different kind of therapy."

My eyes went wide. "You fired her for sleeping with you? You should be ashamed."

"I had no choice," he said irritably. "She changed overnight from a decent physio to a marriage-crazed clinger. I caught her writing *Mrs. St. Cyr* over and over on my medical records, circling it with hearts and flowers." He snorted. "Come on."

"What bad luck you've had," I said sardonically. Then I tilted my head, stroking my cheek. "Or wait. Maybe *you're* the one who's the problem."

"There is no problem," he said smoothly. "Not now that you're here."

I folded my arms. "I still don't understand. Why me? We only met the once, and I'd already given up doing physical therapy then."

"Yes. To be an assistant to the world-famous Madison Lowe. Strange career choice, if you don't mind me saying so, from being a world-class physiotherapist to fetching lattes for your stepsister."

"Who said I was world-class?"

"Ron Smart. Tyrese Carlsen. John Field." He paused. "Great athletes, but notorious womanizers. I'm guessing one of them must have given you reason to quit. Something must have made the idea of being assistant to a spoiled star suddenly palatable."

"My patients have all been completely professional," I said sharply. "I chose to quit physical therapy for—another reason." I looked away.

Users Review

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