



One Night...Nine-Month Scandal

By Sarah Morgan

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Four years ago Kelly stood, bridal bouquet in hand, realizing that her gorgeous groom wasn't walking down the aisle to meet her. Now he's come back to claim what's rightfully his—and that includes one night with Kelly....

But it's a night that has lasting consequences!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Sarah Morgan regularly tops the Borders/Waldenbooks bestseller lists with her lively stories for both Harlequin Presents and Medical Romance.

As a child Sarah dreamed of being a writer and she is now living that dream. When she isn't writing, Sarah enjoys reading, music, movies and any activity that takes her outdoors.

Visit her website at www.sarahmorgan.com

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'I don't care if he's on a conference call, this is urgent!'

The voice outside his office belonged to his lawyer and Alekos paused in mid-sentence as the door burst open.

Dmitri stood there, papers in his hand, his face a strange shade of scarlet.

'I'll call you back,' Alekos drawled and hit the button to disconnect himself from his team in New York and London. 'Given that I've never seen you run anywhere in the ten years you've worked for me, I assume you're the bearer of bad tidings. A tanker has sunk?'

'Quickly.' The normally calm, steady Dmitri sprinted across the spacious office, banged into the desk and spilled the papers over the floor. 'Switch on your computer.'

'I'm already online.' Intrigued, Alekos shifted his gaze to his computer screen. 'What am I supposed to be looking at?'

'Go to eBay,' Dmitri said in a strangled voice. 'Right now. We have three minutes left to bid.'

Alekos didn't waste time pointing out that placing bids with an online auction-house didn't usually form part of his working day. Instead he accessed the site with a few taps of his fingers.

'Diamond,' Dmitri croaked. 'Type in "large, white diamond".'

A premonition forming in his mind, Alekos stabbed the keys. No; she couldn't have. *She wouldn't have.*

As the page sprang onto his screen, he swore softly in Greek while Dmitri sank uninvited onto the nearest chair. 'Am I right? Is it the Zagorakis diamond? Being sold on eBay?'

Alekos stared at the stone and felt emotion punch deep in his gut. Just seeing that ring made him think of *her*, and thinking of her set off a chain reaction in his body that shocked him with its intensity. He struggled to shake off the instantaneous assault on his senses triggered by those rebel thoughts. Even after four years of absence she could still do this to him, he thought grimly. 'It's the diamond. You're sure she is the seller?'

'It would appear so. If the stone had come on the market before now we would have been notified. I have a team checking it out right now, but the bids have already reached a million dollars. Why eBay?' Bending down, Dmitri gathered together the papers he'd dropped. 'Why not Christie's or Sotheby's, or one of the big,

reputable auction-houses? It's a very strange decision.'

'Not strange.' His eyes fixed on the screen, Alekos laughed. 'It's entirely in character. She'd never go to Christie's or Sotheby's.' Her down to earth approach had been one of the things he'd found so refreshing about her. She'd been unpretentious—an attribute that was a rare commodity in the false, glittering world he inhabited.

'Well, whichever.' Dmitri tugged at his tie as if he were being strangled. 'If bids have reached a million dollars then there's a high probability that someone else knows this is the Zagorakis diamond. We have to stop her! Why is she doing this now? Why not four years ago? She had plenty of reason to hate you then.'

Alekos leaned back in his chair, considering that question. When he spoke, his voice was soft. 'She saw the pictures.'

'Of you and Marianna at the charity ball? You think she heard the rumours that the relationship is serious?'

Alekos stared at the ring taunting him from the screen. 'Yes.'

The ring said it all. Its presence on the screen said *this is what I think of what we shared*. It was the equivalent of flinging the diamond into the river, only far, far more effective. She was selling it to the highest bidder in the most public way possible and her message was clear: this ring means nothing to me.

Our relationship meant nothing.

She was in a wild fury.

His own anger slashed like the blade of a knife and he stood up suddenly, taking this latest gesture as confirmation that he'd made the right choice with Marianna. Marianna Konstantin would never do anything as vulgar as sell a ring on eBay. Marianna was far too discreet and well-bred to give away a gift. Her behaviour was always impeccable; she was quiet and restrained, miserly with her emotions and, most importantly, she didn't want to get married.

Alekos stared at the ring on the screen, guessing at the depth of emotion hidden behind the sale. Nothing restrained there. The woman selling his ring gave her emotions freely.

Remembering just how freely, his mouth tightened. It would be good, he thought, to cut that final link. This was the time.

Watching the clock count down on his computer screen, Alekos made an instantaneous decision. 'Bid for it, Dmitri.'

His lawyer floundered. 'Bid? How? You need an account, and there is no time to set one up.'

'We need someone just out of college.' Swift and decisive, Alekos pressed a button on his phone. 'Send Eleni in. Now.'

Seconds later, the youngest PA on his team appeared nervously in the doorway. 'You wanted to speak to me, Mr Zagorakis?'

'Do you have an eBay account?'

Clearly stunned by the unexpected question, the girl gulped. 'Yes, sir.'

'I need you to bid for something. And don't call me sir.' His eyes on the screen, Alekos watched as the clock ticked down: two minutes. He had two minutes in which to retrieve something that should never have left his possession. 'Log in, or whatever it is you do to put in a bid.'

'Yes, sir. Of course.' Crumbling with nerves, the girl hurried to his desk and entered her username and password. She was shaking so badly that she entered her password incorrectly and Alekos clamped his mouth shut, sensing that if he showed impatience he'd just make her more nervous.

'Take your time,' he said smoothly, sending a warning glance towards Dmitri who looked as if he were about to have a stroke.

Finally entering her password correctly, the girl gave him a terrified smile. 'What bid do you want me to place?'

Alekos looked at the screen and made a judgement. 'Two-million US dollars.'

The girl gave an audible gasp. *'How much?'*

'Two million.' Alekos watched the clock counting down: sixty seconds. He had sixty seconds to retrieve an heirloom that he never should have given away. Sixty seconds to close the door on a relationship that never should have happened. 'Do it now.'

'But the limit on my credit card is only f-five hundred pounds,' the girl stammered, 'I can't afford it.'

'But I can. And I'm the one paying for it.' Glancing at the girl's ashen features, Alekos frowned. 'Do *not* pass out. If you faint now, I won't be able to bid for this ring. Dmitri is head of my legal team—he will witness my verbal agreement. We now have thirty seconds, and this is very important to me. Please.'

'Of course, I—sorry.' Her hands shaking, Eleni tapped the amount into the box, hesitated briefly and then pressed enter. 'I—I'm—I mean *you're*—currently the highest bidder,' she said faintly and Alekos lifted an eyebrow.

'Is it done?'

'Providing no one puts in a last-minute bid.'

Alekos, who wasn't taking any chances, promptly put his hands over hers and entered four-million dollars.

Five seconds later, the ring was his and he was pouring the shaking girl a glass of water.

'I'm impressed. Under pressure you responded well and you did what needed to be done. I won't forget it.

And now,' he kept his voice casual, 'I need to know exactly where to send the money. Does the seller give you a name and address?'

Ignoring Dmitri's startled glance, Alekos reached for a pen and paper.

He needed to decide whether to do this in person or hand it over to lawyers.

Lawyers, his common sense told him. *For all the reasons you haven't tracked her whereabouts over the past four years.*

'You can email any questions you have,' Eleni said weakly, her eyes on the diamond on the screen. 'It's a beautiful ring. Lucky woman, ending up with that on her finger. Wow. That's so romantic.' She looked at him wide-eyed and Alekos didn't have the heart to disillusion her.

Had he ever been romantic? If being romantic was to indulge in an impulsive, whirlwind romance then, yes, he'd been romantic. Once. Or maybe 'blinded by lust' would be a more accurate assessment. Fortunately he'd come to his senses in time. With a cynical smile at his own expense, Alekos reflected on the fact that a business approach to relationships, such as the one he had with Marianna, was vastly preferable. He'd had no particular wish to understand her, and she'd showed no interest in trying to understand him.

That was so much better than a girl who tried to climb into your thoughts and then seduced with raw, out-of-control sex that wiped a man's brain.

Feeling the tension ripple across his shoulders, Alekos stared out of the window as Dmitri hastily ushered the girl out of the room, promising to deal with all the financial aspects of the transaction.

Closing the door firmly, the lawyer turned to face Alekos. 'I'll arrange for the funds to be transferred and the ring collected.'

'No.' Driven by an impulse he decided was better not examined, Alekos reached for his jacket. 'I don't want that ring in the hands of a third party. I'll collect it myself.'

'In person? Alekos, you haven't seen the girl for four years. You decided it was best not to get in touch. Are you sure this is a good idea?'

'I only ever have good ideas.' Closure, Alekos thought grimly, striding towards the door. Hand over the money, take the ring and move on.

'Breathe, breathe, breathe. Put your head between your legs—that's it. You're *not* going to faint. OK—that's good. Now, try telling me again—slowly.'

Lifting her head, Kelly mouthed the words. No sound came out. She wondered whether it was possible to go mute with shock. It felt as though her entire body had shut down.

Her friend glared at her in exasperation. 'Kel, I'm giving you thirty seconds to produce sound from your mouth and then I'm throwing a bucket of water over you.'

Kelly dragged in air and tried again. 'Sold—'

Vivien nodded encouragingly. 'You've sold something—right. What have you sold?'

'Sold.' Kelly swallowed. 'Ring.'

'OK, *finally* we're making progress here—I'm getting that you've sold a ring. Which ring?' Viv's eyes suddenly widened. 'Holy crap, not *the* rin...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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