



## Christmas with a Billionaire: Billionaire under the Mistletoe Snowed in with Her Boss A Diamond for Christmas (Harlequin Anthologies)

By Carole Mortimer, Maisey Yates, Joss Wood

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## **Editorial Review**

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'What the hell—?' Max came to an abrupt halt as he stepped inside the entrance hall of his apartment and noticed first the stepladder and then the young red-haired woman perched on top of it. She seemed to be attaching something to one of the paintings.

The young woman, who seemed just as startled to see him, turned sharply, letting out a panicked squeak as the ladder wobbled precariously beneath her, causing her to lose her balance completely.

The squeak became an all-out cry of distress as the ladder continued to wobble before tipping over, leaving her with her arms windmilling ineffectively, her expression one of shocked horror as she hurtled towards the marble floor.

Max acted instinctively, instantly dropping his briefcase before stepping forward to hold out his arms in the hope of arresting her unexpected fall. He let out a loud 'oomph' as she landed hard against his chest, before taking her down with her.

Sophie was too stunned to be able to do much as think for several long seconds. And when her head finally cleared she didn't know whether to laugh in relief at her lucky escape from contact with the hard marble tiles or groan in embarrassment as she realised that she was currently sprawled inelegantly across her new employer.

So much for her reassurances to Sally that Max Hamilton would barely know she was there.

It didn't help that Max Hamilton smelt absolutely divine: a hint of sandalwood and spices, with a tang of lemon. No doubt from his cologne or aftershave.

Or that his breathtakingly sexy voice was now so close to her ear that his breath stirred the curls there as he spoke. It affected her just as much as it had yesterday. So much so that she had fallen off the stepladder the minute she'd heard him speak...

'Ouch,' he muttered beneath her now. 'I think I have a bruised backside at the very least.'

The wild red of Sophie's curls currently covered most of her face, something she was exceedingly grateful for as she felt the blush that now warmed her cheeks. She felt flustered, sprawled across Max Hamilton's chest, her thighs and legs also intimately entangled with his.

It didn't help that an image of that perfectly taut backside also instantly flashed into her mind. She had once seen a photograph in one of the gossip magazines of Sally's boss on a yacht somewhere in the Mediterranean, his only covering a pair of body-hugging black swimming trunks.

'Who are you? And exactly what are you doing in my apartment?' he now demanded irritably.

Obviously the bruising had done nothing to improve his temper.

Sophie struggled to disentangle herself, wrapping her arms about her drawn-up knees as she now sat on the tiled floor beside Max Hamilton. A Max Hamilton who was every bit as gorgeous as he had appeared in the photographs, despite the fact that he was eyeing her with narrow-eyed suspicion as he sat up beside her.

His overlong hair wasn't just dark; it was ebony, taking on a blue-black sheen beneath the overhead lighting. And his handsome face was so much more appealing in the animated flesh—straight dark brows over long-lashed and luminous green eyes, sculptured cheekbones visible beneath the tautness of his tanned flesh, with perfectly chiselled and sensuously kissable lips above a square and determined jaw.

Sophie dragged her gaze away from his mouth, only to look up and find herself instead held mesmerised by those piercing emerald-green eyes.

Eyes that now looked at her accusingly.

Sophie drew in a long and steadying breath as she rose to her feet, unnecessarily brushing her jeans down as she did so; she knew from being here for most of the afternoon that Max Hamilton's luxurious penthouse apartment was spotlessly clean. Courtesy of a cleaner, no doubt; Max Hamilton didn't give the impression he was the sort of man who would willingly wield either a vacuum cleaner or a duster.

She had been stunned when she'd first entered his penthouse apartment, on the twentieth floor of this art deco building. The apartment's decor was beyond opulent, with its pale silk-covered walls, original paintings and antique furnishings. Even the carpets were so luxurious she felt as if she were walking on air.

And walking was what she had done, for over half an hour, as she'd explored the whole of the apartment.

Discovering there were half a dozen bedrooms, each with en suite bathrooms, two of them even having their own small sitting room—no doubt the master and mistress suite! There was also an indoor pool, huge gym, a sauna, a wooden panelled study, two huge sitting rooms and a dining room with a table that would easily seat a dozen people. As for the kitchen...! Sophie would get down on her knees and beg in order to possess a kitchen like the one in this apartment.

She hadn't seen the sort of opulence this apartment possessed outside the pages of one of those glossy magazines that were always to be found in doctors' or dentists' waiting rooms.

Her chin rose now as she looked down at the owner of all that opulence. 'My name is Sophie Carter.'

Max Hamilton rose lithely to his feet as he eyed her mockingly. 'Not Annie?'

'No, but I am an orphan,' Sophie answered tightly, not missing the reference to her fiery red curls and lack of height against his own couple of inches over six feet.

His mouth tightened at the rebuke in her tone. 'I'm sorry for your loss.'

Sophie ignored the condolence. 'I've been hired by your office to deliver your Christmas.' She chose the word deliberately, still irritated that this man found the prospect of having his sister and niece to spend Christmas with him something of a chore rather than the enjoyable experience it should have been. He obviously had no idea how lucky he was to have close family.

'You're the person Sally told me she'd hired?' Max had only been half listening to his PA earlier today, when

Sally had informed him that she had hired someone to deal with all the arrangements for Christmas at his apartment with his sister and niece.

At the time he had been between several telephone calls from Cynthia Maitland, as she'd bemoaned the fact that he wouldn't be joining her in Aspen for Christmas, after all.

If nothing else, he had learnt a lot from those telephone calls: namely that Cynthia was becoming far too possessive about what had been, after all, only a casual affair between them. Learning that Cynthia now obviously had expectations—of their relationship and of himself—had been enough to leave Max feeling relieved to have an excuse to avoid her.

Max realised now that he should have paid more attention earlier to Sally, and that he had absolutely no idea who, what or where this petite red-haired woman had come from.

'Do you have a problem with that?' Huge brown eyes now looked up at him challengingly.

Not per se, obviously; it was only three days till Janice and Amy flew in to Heathrow, after all. But the young woman standing in front of him, with her mop of wild shoulder-length red curls framing a heart-shaped face dominated by freckles and those huge brown eyes and dressed in a red cable-knit sweater and hip and thigh-hugging jeans over heavy brown boots, looked barely old enough to have left school, let alone be responsible for organising his Christmas.

She certainly wasn't what Max had imagined when Sally had told him that someone would be going into his apartment today to start work immediately on his Christmas arrangements.

'There was no one else at the agency available?' he prompted uncertainly.

Sophie Carter smiled, instantly drawing Max's attention to wide and generous lips over small, perfectly straight white teeth. Sensuously generous lips that surprisingly gave him totally inappropriate thoughts!

'No,' she answered him dismissively.

'But.'

'It's quite simple really, Mr Hamilton—you either want me to organise Christmas for your family or you don't. But, as I understood it, your PA has now gone away for the holidays?' She lifted questioning auburn brows.

Max wasn't altogether sure he liked Sophie Carter's attitude. Or her, for that matter.

Likewise, he wasn't sure if she liked him, if her challenging tone, and that slightly contemptuous curl to her top lip, was any indication. But beggars couldn't be choosers, and Sally had vouched for his newest employee when he had confirmed she could call security at his apartment so that the woman could come in and start work putting up the Christmas decorations.

And, looking about him, he could see that Sophie Carter had done exactly that. There was already a real six foot tall Christmas tree standing in the entrance hall, not decorated yet, but there was an overflowing box of brightly coloured ornaments beside it, obviously in readiness.

There were also sprigs of real berried holly tucked behind the picture frames. That seemed to be what Sophie Carter had been doing when he'd entered the apartment and startled her into falling off the step-ladder.

'It looks great so far,' he complimented lightly. 'I just— For some reason, I had expected you to be older.'

'You should have stopped while you were ahead, Mr Hamilton!'

That derisive smile grew wider, caused dimples to appear in her freckled cheeks.

Max grimaced. 'Was I ahead?'

'Probably not,' she came back drily.

He gave an irritated shake of his head. 'Have we met before?'

Sophie Carter gave a snort of laughter. 'That's not very likely, is it?'

Max raised dark brows. 'Why is that?'

She gave a dismissive wave of her hand that nevertheless managed to encompass the luxury of his penthouse apartment as well as his own appearance, as opposed to her own less than sartorial elegance in jeans, a jumper and heavy boots.

Max's own attention stayed on that slender artistic hand, the fingers long and delicate, the nails kept practically short. One of his particular hates was long, red-painted talons that could scratch a man's back to pieces when—

Now that really was an inappropriate thought when made in connection to the hired help!

'Do you do this sort of thing all the time or is this just a holiday job for you?' Max tried again.

She shrugged slender shoulders. 'I'm on Christmas break from my college course.'

Which meant she must be at least eighteen, Max realised. 'In?'

'Catering and business management,' she seemed to reveal reluctantly.

'So this is just a temp job to earn some extra money during the holidays?' he realised.

'Yes,' she confirmed tightly.

Max's brows lowered as he frowned. 'And have you done this organising Christmas thing before?'

'Many times,' she assured drily.

'Do you—'

'Perhaps you would prefer it if I stopped what I'm doing for now?' She spoke briskly. 'I can easily come back again in the morning. After you've left for work, of course.'

What Max would really like would be to know why it was that this woman seemed to have decided she disliked him before she had even met him. Because he was pretty sure that she had. After all, his first act had been to save her from what could have been a nasty, and painful, fall onto the marble-tiled floor of his entrance hall.

He shrugged. 'There isn't actually a lot of time left before Christmas.'

'No,' Sophie acknowledged evenly, more than a little disturbed at the realisation that she found Max Hamilton so immediate, as well as so fiercely, intrusively masculine.

She had known yesterday that just the sound of his voice sent shivers of awareness down her spine—that huskily sexy voice that made a woman think of silk sheets and naked, entwined bodies.

But the last thing Sophie had been expecting was to find the man himself so attractive that her knees felt weak and her hands trembled slightly. She could kind of see where Sally's friend Cathy had been coming from with this guy. It was just as well she and Sally had agreed not to admit to the family connection.

'It really is your choice, Mr Hamilton,' she added dismissively. 'After all, you're the one paying the bill.'

He considered her with those deep green eyes for several seconds before speaking again. 'Maybe the two of us should start again over a glass of wine. You are old enough to drink, I take it?' he added hastily.

'I'm twenty-four, Mr Hamilton. I've been allowed to drink for several years.' Sophie eyed him irritably.

'Twenty-four?' He looked startled. 'You don't look it.' He eyed her doubtfully.

'Well, you don't look like a man who is either too busy or too lazy to organise Christmas for his sister and niece, but obviously looks can be deceiving,' Sophie came back tartly.

And instantly had cause to regret that tartness as those hard green eyes narrowed to dangerous slits.

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