



This Wicked Gift

Courtney Milan

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Lavinia Spencer is too poor to be anything but practical. But when her younger brother lands himself in trouble, she has no choice but to do the unthinkable. She accepts the help of the dishonorable man that she's always wanted, even knowing that it might mean her ruination...

This Wicked Gift is a novella prequel to the Carhart series. The full series is:

Proof by Seduction

Trial by Desire

This historical romance novella is an enhanced ebook. The unenhanced text was originally published in the anthology "The Heart of Christmas." This work contains pictures, audio, and author commentary. You can read this enhanced ebook on any device, but the audio content may not be accessible on all ereaders. That content has been made available on the web, so you won't miss anything if your device doesn't support audio.

This Wicked Gift Details

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From Reader Review This Wicked Gift for online ebook

Blackjack says

I enjoyed this early Milan novella and it made me realize that as I await a new historical romance from her in 2017, I need to read the Carhart books.

The themes Milan explores in *This Wicked Gift* at times stay a bit too much at the abstract level, and in this respect it's easy to see how much she has grown as a writer over the years. The main idea permeating the story is the hero's self-loathing and anger at his dismal prospects in life given the rigid class hierarchies of London society, and how much William allows his cynicism to inform his pining for Lavinia. As the story begins, Lavinia has taken over maintaining her ill father's book store while William visits it daily, more to take in the sight of his unrequited love for Lavinia than to find reading material. (Looking back on this story, I kind of wish the art of reading was developed more because I love bookshops as settings.) One day, William just happens to overhear Lavinia's conversation with her brother in which he tries to explain to his sister how he managed to squander the small sum of money Lavinia had managed to save up for Christmas. William's quandary is established from the start: should he use some of his own paltry salary to help Lavinia or should he bargain with her to get her into bed with him instead. He opts for the latter, making him a very unlikely hero for a romance. Lavinia, however, recognizes in her negotiations with William that he has allowed himself to sink into despair and misanthropy, and though she has options other than William's money to get out of the bind she finds herself in, she decides to have sex with William to teach him the valuable lesson that not all things in life have a price tag on them. It's a complicated metaphor that I'm not sure completely works out here, and it's an important one because both characters' integrity depends on reader sympathy and understanding. William is a cad for blackmailing Lavinia, but he's also a victim of other cads who have mistreated him. I'm not sure I completely bought the idea that the love of a good woman saves William, but I do think that Milan's efforts are transparent and I did want to believe that William is redeemed in the end. Given the condensed space to unravel the issues, I wonder if a longer story would have worked better here. I'm curious also to see if William's employer features in the Carhart series too, as I was intrigued by Gareth.

Pamela Shropshire says

Cute little novella. The H/h are both poverty stricken and just hanging on to respectability. Her family owns a lending library and the hero works as a clerk for the Marquess of Blakely. He is pretty immature and bitter at the beginning - despondent actually. He makes some questionable choices. Lavinia helps him to be a better person; William in turn helps Lavinia's rather spoiled little brother see that he should help his sister more. The story ends with William getting a job with the Marquess's grandson that will allow him to support a family, so a true HEA.

? Irena ? says

This prequel of a series seems to follow similar pattern as the one from Brothers Sinister: an impoverished girl, a working class young man, one has to convince the other of love or something like that, obstacles and so on. While I really liked *The Governess Affair* because the characters were great, these two are really

bland. Either this was too short to develop their characters, which wouldn't be the case since *The Governess Affair* is shorter than this, or they are simply not as striking as Hugo Marshall and Serena. That, and certain actions didn't exactly endear them to me.

Aoi says

Skillfully written, as expected :)

But seriously, what the eff was the plot all about? The hero, too poor to take a wife, literally coerces the heroine to his bed. The heroine has too good a head on her shoulders to actually fall for this, but pretends to and sleeps with him anyway.. Is this supposed to negate his selfish intentions and make this romantic?!

BookMaven says

Dismal, Depressing, and Absolutely Creepy

Dismal, Depressing, and Absolutely Creepy

Lavinia Spencer discovers that her younger brother has stolen and lost her savings. She has taken over the family business, because her father is ill. The lending library she manages only supports the most meager existence. The theft means no Christmas niceties at all. One of her customers, William Q. White, was in the library when he accidentally overhears the conversation between Lavinia and her brother. This prompts William to take advantage of the situation.

I was so disappointed in this book. I was excited to find a new author. I never dreamed that I would be taken down a path of extreme desperation and poverty, plus have to contend with a very dishonorable "hero". The actions of the hero were absolutely creepy. The fact that Lavinia decided to love him anyway, despite only seeing him a few times in her library, where he refused to speak to her, did not make this plot line any more palatable to me. Courtney Milan can write. I just don't like this "everything is dismal and depressing, so rape and blackmail is okay" storyline, which is wrapped up in one afternoon into wealth and power. Huh? I could have lived much better without this story in my head.

Anya says

And last night, I fell asleep with the biggest smile on my face.

"So it's nonsense, what I owe you. But what you owe me is a tremendous burden, one that can never be repaid? Love is not about accounting. It's not lines on a ledger. You cannot store up credit and redeem yourself at some later date, not with gifts or deeds or any number of coins, no matter how carefully you bestow them. You repay love with love, William."

Elizabeth says

Generally I love what Courtney Milan writes, but WTF is up with this novella?

Hero: I like her, but I'm pretty damn poor and she'll never consider me so why don't I spend the last 10 pounds I have so that I can coerce her into bed. Only night and I'm ruining her, but it'll be worth it.

Heroine: Yeah, so he's coercing me into bed. But I have the hots for him and really want to, so what they hey. Let's do it, it's not coercion if I'm willing even if he's acting like a douchebag.

So, you lost me. 2.5 on my five star romance scale.

Kaethe says

This Wicked Gift (A Carhart Series Novella) (Entangled Edge) - Courtney Milan 7 January, 2017

It's a snowday, which is only a delight on schooldays, not on weekends, which are properly devoted to doing a vast number of things. Not me, I'm perfectly happy to spend a day reading and napping with cats. But for two highschool students who have active social and extracurricular lives, there is consternation. All day long.

And then, after supper, there was terrific drama: a loud noise, cats running, blood on the floor. It was necessary to catch the cat, and hold him still, and find a clean washcloth, and run warm water on it, and try to get him to hold still by constant bribes of cat treats, and try and locate the source of the blood, and try to put a spot of antibiotic ointment on a twenty-two pound cat, and then trying to figure out a way to bandage the tail, which clearly wasn't bothering the cat, but was leaving tiny blood smears every where.

Fortunately Calder did not lose half his tail in a violent accident, just the merest square centimeter of skin and fur from the pointy tip. It's only funny if he's fine. But now I have a moment of quiet and I don't have the energy to hunt down something new. So this is good.

10 July, 2015

Caz says

4.5 stars

This is, I believe, Ms Milan's first published work, and is an introductory novella to her Carhart books. In it, Miss Lavinia Spencer is caring for her sick father and her younger brother as well as running their family business, a circulating library. Money is incredibly tight, but Lavinia has been scrupulously saving pennies here and there, because she wants her family to have a wonderful Christmas complete with a goose, spices for mulled wine and the few other trimmings they can afford.

But the money she has worked so hard to scrape together is lost when her younger brother James uses it to buy into a fraudulent business venture – and even worse, he owes ten pounds to the man who has cheated him.

The conversation in which James confesses his predicament is overheard by one of the library's regular customers, Mr William White, who has, unbeknownst to her, been hankering after Lavinia for the last year. William has come down in the world – an inheritance he had hoped for seems farther away than ever, and he makes a pittance working as a clerk in the offices of the curmudgeonly Marquess of Blakely. He's tired and he's bitter, and when he sees the chance to have something he desperately wants, the chance to have one bright memory amid the drudgery of his daily existence, he grabs it, no matter that it's completely underhand and dishonourable. He finds out to whom James' debt is owed, buys up the note of hand, even though it practically beggars him to do it, and then proceeds to – he thinks – blackmail Lavinia into his bed.

He has no idea that Lavinia is just as smitten with him as he is with her, or that she has other options for paying the debt. Even as he seduces her with a great deal of care and tenderness, he hates himself, telling himself that what he is doing is despicable – but he does it anyway. I'm sure this is a bone of contention for many, the hero of a romance forcing the heroine to have sex with him, but the point is that Lavinia is not coerced or forced – she wants to make love with William, and also to show him the value of those things that can't be bought with money. There's also the fact that he's a despairing and bitter man, who has lost his way in life – and that he loathes himself so thoroughly for what he does that it's almost impossible not to feel sorry for him.

Lavinia is perhaps just a little too good to be true. I felt that she should at least have bawled William out about his *intentions*, even if the act was something she desired as much as he did. But then, she's capable of tremendous insight, realising he's beating himself up about it more than she ever could, and it's her loving forgiveness that sets William back on the right path and enables him to find the decent man buried under the layers of bitterness and resentment.

There aren't many authors who could take a story that deals with people living on the bread-line and turn it into an uplifting story, or who could make a hero out of a man who stoops to blackmail the heroine into sleeping with him, but Courtney Milan manages it. It undoubtedly helps that her narrator in this audiobook version of the story is once again the wonderful Rosalyn Landor, whose portrayal of William is particularly sympathetic and, it has to be said, sexy, his soft and slightly accented speech revealing much about his true nature.

This Wicked Gift is perhaps not Ms Milan's best novella (that honour belongs to either *The Governess Affair* or *A Kiss For Midwinter*) but it's still a sight better than most of the other novellas I've read – and many full-length books and audios, too!

Lexxi Kitty says

I loathed the main male character from beginning to end. LOATHED. He was described in such a way that in any other book he'd be a villain or a source of . . . satiric humor. Satire-ic. Bah.

The woman? The main quality about her that I disliked was . . . that she was interested in this jackass. Otherwise she was a great character. That's a massive thing to overcome, though, liking this miserable piece

of shit – that male lead character.

Right, so, this is a 100 something prequel to a series I've not read yet. It stars people that made me add a shelf – though I'd thought I already had that one. Instead of the normal 'rich-rich' that most English historical fiction feature (or, at least, 'titled-titled'), this book actually featured two people who can be called poor (or working class; technically the lead male character talked about himself in such a way that he sounded like he had the worst lowest of the low jobs on earth and was in hell – except the job in actuality was more middle class – professional class, but whatever, didn't pay a lot and didn't require an advanced degree. Jackass McJackass (his name is not in the book description; it's not, but it is something like 'Jonathan Q. Smith') works as a finance guy for a titled person – one of whom will feature in the series proper (Carhart).

Jackass fancies a particular woman – that woman is the female lead in this book. Figuring he's a piece of shit, working a hell job, and has no future, he mostly ignores her when he's in her store (she runs a bookstore/lending library for her ailing father). Also because of the aforementioned believe that he, himself, is shit, he decided to 'take advantage' of the woman because obviously she'd not want anything to do with him otherwise. So he blackmails her/coerces her. She . . . has lusted after him for a long time, finds his methods and actions pathetic, in a sad way, and . . . fucks him (not because of being blackmailed, but because she's horny – this is part of what I meant in my status updates that the man was melodramatically doom and gloom and had a virgin fetish (more in the 'oh god I've ruined her!!!!!!!!!!!!!!' way, than in a 'must fuck all virgins' way); while she's all 'I was horny, I wanted to fuck, fuck you and your virgin fetish/ruined what's-so-call-it, I'm no lady looking to land a titled man; nor am I servant whose reputation can be blackened to the point of being unable to secure work; etc. etc.etc.').

I fear I've gone too far down a particular path. I just found the lead male character so loathsome that he is overwhelming my ability to think in a rational and coherent manner. Not loathsome in a 'bad boys are hot' way, but loathsome in 'I'm a shit, a large turd, I know this, my life will always be like this, so I'll act like it . . . poorly'* way.

'*' – even when he tries to act poorly, he is loathsomely rotten at it. The guy is a massive loser . . . who is handsome . . . enough for the lead female character to become tongue tied around him. At least until he opened his mouth and revealed he's a jackass mcjackass. Whereupon she handily handled him. Handily.

Right, so, horrible loathsome book.

Rating: oh. I did not remember I rated this 1.75 stars until just now. So, apparently that's the rating I gave. 1.75 stars.

June 10 2018

Katie Michaels says

From most other authors, I doubt I would have been able to enjoy this story. In fact, part of me finished it feeling like I really should have disliked it. After all, the hero was willing to essentially force himself on the heroine. It wasn't actually rape; and despite his intentions, it wasn't even extortion. But the point is, he was willing to do it and that's a pretty substantial thing to overcome.

I suppose I should start at the beginning. Lavina runs her father's bookshop now that he is ill and her mother has passed away. Money is tight and she must scrimp and save every penny for even the smallest luxuries. So when her immature and self-centered younger brother blows their savings on a stupid scheme, things look pretty bleak. That's where William comes in.

William White barely has two pennies to rub together. He lives on the pittance that he makes as a clerk; that and the hope that one day he'll get the inheritance promised him –and one day, he'll know Lavina's kiss. When he hears of her predicament, he figures he can finally get one of the two things he has wished for. Using what little money he has, he buys her brother's debt and offers her an indecent proposal to forgive the note.

Unbeknownst to William, Lavina does have other options, but she gives in to his demands. She has always wanted him too –and she wants to teach him about the value of love given freely. Here's the thing. William thought he was taking her against her will. I have big issues with non-consent and even though it technically wasn't, that's a pretty big offense to forgive of the hero. And yet, I did. I don't feel very evolved about it. And some readers may be really turned off. But I still enjoyed the story. Maybe it was because we started from Lavina's perspective and I felt how she pined for him. Maybe it was because William loathed himself enough for the both of us. Either way, I found myself rooting for them to be together.

As always, Courtney Milan draws me into her characters and their circumstance. And with this enhanced edition novella, I enjoyed getting a little extra perspective on her thought process. Overall, I liked this one, but I think others make take issue with the hero's actions, regardless of his remorse.

Rating: B

**ARC provided by author for review*

Miss says

oh yikes. i understand what milan was going for here? but like. even if it wasn't the ~reality~ william def thought he was coercing lavinia into having sex with him and did it anyways? WHAT THE HELL HERO?

if you can get past that this has some kind things to say about hope and choosing to be a good person no matter your circumstances! but. YIKES

2.5 stars

Just A. Bean says

I'm really, really glad this isn't the first Milan book I ever read, because she's my absolute favourite romance author, and this novella could have permanently put me off her.

Reading the added content, I somewhat get what she was trying to do with this story, but it didn't work for me at all. Basically, the main character is a rapist, and the story never really deals with it, and he ends up with a good job and married to the woman he raped. NOPE.

Sophie says

This one was cute, but I thought the beginning extremely unrealistic. By the end, however, I was cheering William on as he learned to believe in himself and got himself a job in the process. Looking forward to reading the rest of this series.

Katrina Passick Lumsden says

Another fantastic novella from Milan. I've said it before and I'll say it again; her novellas are superb. I often enjoy them more than her full length novels. Perhaps because the tension isn't drawn out quite so far. As with any of Milan's work, the characters in This Wicked Gift are believable and likable, the prose is phenomenal, and the plot is engaging.
