



Ravensdale's Defiant Captive (The Ravensdale Scandals)

By Melanie Milburne

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Julius is renowned for his ironclad control, but provocative whirlwind Holly pushes him to his breaking point! Especially when he discovers the vulnerabilities behind her wild-child bravado. With every touch, he wants Holly more, and once he's had her in his bed, holding her captive there becomes an irresistible temptation...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Melanie Milburne read her first Harlequin at age seventeen in between studying for her final exams. After completing a master's degree in education she decided to write a novel in between settling down to do a PhD. She became so hooked on writing romance, the PhD was shelved, and soon after she was signed on to the London office of Harlequin's Mills and Boon line.

Carolyn Morris has narrated numerous romance novels, including the Spindle Cove series by Tessa Dare.

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Julius Ravensdale knew his housekeeper was up to something as soon as she brought in his favourite dessert. 'Queen's pudding?' He raised one of his brows. 'I never have dessert at lunch unless it's a special occasion.'

'It is a special occasion,' Sophia said as she put the meringue-topped dessert in front of him.

He narrowed his gaze. 'Okay, tell me. What's going on?'

Sophia's expression was sheepish. 'I'm bringing in a girl to help me run the house. It's only for a month until this wretched tendonitis settles. The extra pair of hands will be so helpful and I'll be doing my bit for society. It's a win-win.'

Julius glanced at the wrist brace Sophia had been wearing for the past couple of weeks. He knew she worked far too hard and could do with the extra help but he liked to keep the staff numbers down in the villa. Not because he was mean about paying them. He would pay them triple to stay away and let him get on with his work. 'Who is it?'

'Just a girl who's in need of a bit of direction.' Julius mentally rolled his eyes. Of all the housekeepers he could have chosen, he had employed the Argentinian reincarnation of Mother Teresa. 'I thought we agreed your lame ducks were restricted to the stables or the gardens?'

'I know, but this girl will go to prison if—' 'Prison?' he said. 'You're bringing a convicted criminal here?'

'She's only been in trouble a couple of times,' Sophia said. 'Anyway, maybe the guy deserved it.'

'What did she do to him?'

'She keyed his brand-new sports car.'

Julius's gut clenched at the thought of his showroom-perfect Aston Martin housed in the garage. 'I suppose she said it was an accident?'

'No, she admitted to it,' Sophia said. 'She was proud of it. That and the message she sprayed on his lawn with weed killer.'

'She sounds delightful.'

'So you'll agree to have her?'

Julius took in his housekeeper's hopeful expression. His sarcasm was lost on her. Sophia was the most charitable person he knew. Always doing things for others. Always looking for a way to make a difference in someone's life. He knew she was lonely since both her adult children had moved abroad for work. What would it hurt to indulge her just this once? He would be busy with fine-tuning his space software. He had less than a month to iron out the kinks in the programming before he presented it to the research team for funding approval.

He let out a long breath. 'I don't suppose you've ever thought of taking up knitting or cross-stitch instead?'

Sophia beamed at him. 'Just wait until you meet her. You're going to love her.'

* * *

Holly considered making a run for it when the van stopped but the size of the villa and its surrounds made her pause. It was big. Way big. Massive. It probably had its own area code. Maybe its own political party. It was four storeys high, built in a neo-classical style with spectacular gardens and lush, rolling fields fringed by thick forest. It didn't look anything like the detention centre she'd envisaged. There was no twelve-foot-high fence with electrified barbed wire at the top. There was no surveillance tower and no uniformed, rifle-toting guards—or, at least, none she could see—casing the joint. It looked like a top-end hotel—a luxurious and very private resort for the rich and famous. Which kind of made her wonder why she'd been sent here. Not that she'd been expecting chains and bread and water or anything, but still. This was seriously over the top.

'It's only for a month,' Natalia Varela, her caseworker, said as the decorative wrought-iron gates opened electronically, allowing them access to the long, sweeping limestone driveway leading to the immaculately maintained villa. 'You got off lightly considering your rap sheet. I know a few people who'd happily swap places with you.'

Holly grunted. Folded her arms across her breasts. Crossed her right leg over her left. Jerked her ankle up and down. Pouted. Why should she look happy? Why should she act *grateful* that she was being sent to live with some man she'd never heard of in his big, old fancy villa?

A month.

Thirty-one days of living with some stranger who had magnanimously volunteered to 'reform' her. Ha-ha. Like that was going to work. Who was this guy anyway? All she'd been told was he was some hotshot techie nerd from England who had made the big time in Argentina designing software for space telescopes used in the Atacama Desert in neighbouring Chile. Oh, and he was apparently single. Holly rolled her eyes. He'd agreed to take on a troubled young woman for altruistic reasons? And the correctional authorities had actually *fallen* for that?

Yeah, right. She knew all about men and their dodgy motivations.

After being given the all clear from the security intercom device, Natalia drove through the gates before they whispered shut behind the car. 'Julius Ravensdale is doing you a big favour,' she said. 'He's only agreed to this—and very reluctantly at that—because his housekeeper has tendonitis in her wrist. You'll be her right-hand helper. It's an amazing opportunity. This place is like a five-star resort. It'll be great vocational training for you. I hope you'll make the most of it.'

Vocational training for what? Holly thought with a cynical curl of her lip. No one was going to make a housekeeper out of her just because she'd made a few mistakes, which weren't even really mistakes, because her pond-scum stepfather had seriously had it coming to him. It was just a dumb old sports car, for pity's sake. So what if he had to have it re-sprayed and his precious lawn re-sown after the weedkiller incident?

Holly was not going to be some rich man's lowly slave scrubbing floors until her knees grew callouses as big as cabbages. Her days of being pushed around were long over. Julius Ravens-whatever-his-name-was would be in for a big shock if he thought he could exploit her to suit his nefarious needs.

What if it wasn't the kitchen he planned to have her slaving in? What if he had more salacious plans? In her experience, men with money thought they could have anything and anyone they wanted. All that nonsense about him 'reluctantly' agreeing to take her on was just a ruse. Of course he would say that. He wouldn't want to look *too* eager to take in a prison statistic waiting to happen. He would be 'doing his bit for society' by trying to *do her*.

Bring it on, she thought. *Let's see how far you get.*

'Oh, I'll make the most of it, all right,' Holly said as she sent the caseworker a guileless smile. 'You can be sure of that.'

Natalia let out a world-weary sigh as she put her foot back on the accelerator. 'Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of.'

The housekeeper whom she had met a few days before greeted Holly at the door of the villa while Natalia took an urgent call from one of her other charges.

'It's lovely to have you here, Holly,' Sophia said. 'Come in. Señor Ravensdale is busy just now so I'll show you to your suite so you can settle in.'

Holly wasn't expecting a welcoming committee with banners and balloons and a brass band or anything but surely the very least her host could do was make an appearance? If he'd agreed to have her here then he could at least do the polite thing and greet her face to face. 'Where is he?' she asked.

'He's not to be disturbed,' Sofia said. 'I'll show you to the suite I've pre—'

'Disturb him, please,' Holly said. 'Now.'

Sophia looked a little taken aback. 'He doesn't like to be interrupted while he's working. He doesn't allow anyone into his office unless it's an emergency.'

Holly gently elbowed her way past to the door she took to be the study. It was the only door that was closed along the long, wide corridor. She didn't knock. She turned the handle and barged in.

A man looked up from behind a desk where he was tapping at a computer keyboard. His fingers stalled as she came in, the last click echoing in the silence as his gaze met with hers.

Holly drew in a breath to speak but for some reason her voice wasn't on active duty. It had locked behind her shock at how different he was from her expectations. He was nothing like she had envisaged. He wasn't old or even middle-aged. He was in his early thirties and movie-star handsome, athletically lean and tanned. His hair was a rich dark brown with light waves running through it. It looked as if it had been recently styled with his fingers, for she could see the roughly spaced plough marks that gave him a sexily tousled look, as if he'd just tumbled out of bed after vigorous sex. He had a determined looking jaw, a straight nose and a firm but sensually sculptured mouth that for some reason made the ligaments at the backs of her knees weaken alarmingly.

He pushed back his chair, and the room instantly shrank as he stood. 'Can I help you?' he said with the sort of tone that suggested he was not in the least motivated to do so.

Holly had never been one to beat about the bush. Her tactic was to get in there with a verbal weed-whacker. 'Don't you know it's impolite to ignore your guests when they arrive?'

His eyes held hers with steely focus. 'Strictly speaking, you're not my guest. You're Sophia's.'

Holly hitched up her chin, flashing him an I-know-what-you're-up-to glare. 'I want to let you know straight from the outset I'm not here to be your sex toy.'

His dark brows rose in twin arcs over his impossibly dark blue eyes. With his black hair and olive-skinned complexion, she had been expecting them to be brown. But they were an astonishing sapphire-blue fringed with thick black lashes. He seemed to measure her for a moment; his gaze taking in the tiny diamond nose piercing and the pink streaks in her hair with a tilt of his mouth that was unmistakably mocking.

A knot of bitterness inside Holly tightened. If there was one thing she loathed, it was being made fun of.

Belittled. Mocked.

'How do you do, Miss, er...?' He glanced at his housekeeper, who had come in behind Holly, for a prompt.

'Miss Perez,' Sophia said. 'Hollyanne.'

'Holly,' Holly said with a black look.

Julius offered his hand. 'How do you do, Holly?'

She glared at his hand as if he'd just offered her a viper. 'Keep your hands to yourself.'

Natalia entered his office sounding a little flustered. 'I'm terribly sorry, Dr Ravensdale, but I had to take an urgent call about another client—'

Holly swung around and frowned at Natalia. 'Doctor? You didn't tell me he was a doctor. You said he was a computer geek.'

The caseworker gave Julius a pained smile before addressing Holly. 'Dr Ravensdale has a PhD in

astrophysics. It's polite to call him by his correct title, if that's what he prefers.'

Holly swung back to look at Julius. 'What do you want me to call you? Sir? Master? Oh Mighty Learned One? Your Royal Tightness?'

His lips twitched as if he was fighting back a reluctant smile. 'Julius will be fine.'

'As in Caesar?'

'As it turns out, yes.'

'You're into Shakespeare?' Holly said it as if it was a noxious disease from which she had so far managed to escape contamination. No point letting him think she was anything but what he had already judged her as: uneducated and unsophisticated. Trailer trash.

'No, but my parents are.'

'Why'd you agree to have me here?' she said, eye-balling him.

'I didn't want you here,' he said. 'But my current domestic circumstances made it impossible for me to refuse.'

Holly folded her arms across her chest. 'I can't cook,' she said with an obdurate 'so what are you going to do about *that*?' look.

'I'm sure you can learn.'

'And I hate housework,' she said. 'It's sexist expecting women to clean up after you. Just because I've got boobs and ovaries doesn't mean I—'

'Point taken,' he said quickly. So quickly Holly wondered if he was worried she was going to list all of her feminine assets. 'However, you need to do your stint of community service,' he continued. 'I need some help around the house until Sophia gets better. It's win-win.'

Holly made a harrumphing noise and unwound her locked arms, turning her gaze to the caseworker. 'Have you done a police check on him to make sure he's the real deal?'

'I can assure you, Holly, Dr Ravensdale is a totally trustworthy guardian,' the caseworker said.

Holly pushed her bottom lip out like a drawer as she swung back to size Julius up. 'Do you drink?'

'Socially.'

'Smoke?' 'No.' 'Drugs?' 'No.'

Holly upped her brazenness another notch. 'Sex?'

'Holly...' the caseworker began.

'What?' Holly asked with a petulant scowl.

'You're embarrassing Dr Ravensdale.'

'I'm not embarrassed,' Julius said. 'But I'm also not going to answer such an impudent question.'

Holly coughed out a laugh. 'Which means you're not getting any, right?'

He stared her down with a look that made her insides feel wobbly. He didn't look the type of man to go too long between drinks. He looked the type of man who could take his pick of women. She could feel his sensual allure like a force field. Her mind ran wild with images of him getting down to business. He wouldn't be one for a quick, sleazy grope. He would take his time. He would know his way around a woman's body. He would know how to send female senses spinning into the stratosphere. She could see it in the darkly confident glint of his gaze. 'While we're on the topic,' he said, 'I would appreciate it if you would abstain from bringing men here for the purpose of having intimate relations with them.'

'So...you get to have sex but I don't? That is...' Holly dropped her voice to a deliberately husky purr '...unless we have it with each other?'

'I have to get going,' the caseworker said as her phone buzzed with an incoming message. 'Holly, I hope you'll behave yourself while you're here. This is your last chance, don't forget. If this fails you know where you'll be going.'

'Yeah, yeah, yeah,' Holly said with a bored flicker of her eyelids as she turned to look at the view from one of the windows next to a wall of bookshelves. She didn't want to go to prison but neither did she want to be exploited by yet another man who assumed he had some sort of power over her. If Julius Ravensdale wanted a plaything, why hadn't he cut one from the herd? The herd he belonged to—the 'beautiful people' herd. She wasn't even his type. How could she be, with her cheap chain-store clothes? Not to mention her background. The background she was still trying to escape. It clung to her like thick axle grease. No amount of washing and cleansing and sanitising would remove it.

Julius Ravensdale came from money. She could see it in the way he dressed, in the way he held himself with supreme confidence, with cool and collected authority. She could see it in the furnishings he surrounded himself with: the priceless paintings, the books and the hand-woven floor coverings. He hadn't lived his childhood in sweat-soaked fear. He hadn't had to fight for survival. He'd had everything handed to him on a gilt-edged platter. Why was he agreeing to have her here if not to make use of her? She clenched her back teeth in determination. He would *not* use her.

She would use *him* first.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Arlene Oliver:

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Alma Brady:

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Keith Lugo:

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