



What a Sicilian Husband Wants (The Irresistible Sicilians)

By Michelle Smart

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*Harlequin Presents author Michelle Smart's fabulous trilogy will delight, entice and enthrall! Meet three dark-hearted men with devastating appeal and the women who prove more than a match for them in **The Irresistible Sicilians!***

On his terms only!

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Grace swore her daughter wouldn't grow up among the dark power and money of his family...but no one walks away from Luca Mastrangelo. Now, back within his reach, Grace is surprised to see new depths to the man she married, and each crack in his armor makes it harder to fight the desire still blazing between them.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Michelle Smart is a Publishers Weekly bestselling author with a slight-to-severe coffee addiction. A book worm since birth, Michelle can usually be found hiding behind a paperback, or if it's an author she really loves, a hardback. Michelle lives in rural Northamptonshire in England with her husband and two young Smarties. When not reading or pretending to do the housework she loves nothing more than creating worlds of her own. Preferably with lots of coffee on tap. www.michelle-smart.com.

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Grace reached the bottom of the stairs and padded barefoot to the alarm on the wall. Working on autopilot, she punched in the code and disabled it along with the sensors running throughout the ground floor. Only once had she forgotten to deactivate it. She had still been half asleep, little more than a zombie. By the time she had walked into the kitchen, the house was making more noise than a dozen hen parties trapped in a large room consuming vast quantities of Jaeger Bombs.

She switched the kettle on and yawned loudly.

Coffee. That was what she needed—a strong dose of caffeine and a good blast of sugar.

While waiting for the kettle to boil, she pulled back the insulating curtains covering the back door and peeked through the pane of glass. Bright early-morning sunlight temporarily blinded her. Squinting, she was greeted with the sight of a thick layer of frost covering the garden. It made her skin feel cold just looking at it. She dropped the curtain sharpish.

Still shivering, she turned to the kitchen table and switched the laptop on. Leaving it to boot up, she made her coffee, adding a huge dollop of milk to cool it down quicker. She brought the mug to her lips and was about to take her first sip when the doorbell rang.

A chill that had nothing to do with the cold outside swept through her, seeping into her bones.

Every hair on her body stood to attention.

Her heart crashed against her ribs, the motion strong enough to unbalance her and slosh hot coffee over her hand and fingers.

She winced and muttered an oath, but the slight scald did her good. It snapped her to attention.

Shoving the mug on the counter, spilling more coffee in the process, she wiped her smarting hand on her dressing gown and strode to the tall cupboard in the corner. She pulled out a wicker basket, burrowed a hand under the pile of tea towels and reached for the small, cold handgun.

The doorbell rang out a second time.

The laptop now booted and ready to use, she clicked on the icon that connected to the live feed from the four surveillance cameras covering the perimeter of her house. The screen split into quarters. Only the top right-

hand frame showed anything out of the ordinary.

She didn't recognise the small figure wrapped in the thick parka, woolly hat and matching scarf. The woman's knees were springing slightly and she clutched a large bag to her belly, no doubt trying to keep warm in the icy conditions.

Torn between a hard-wired wariness towards strangers and feeling sorry for the freezing woman, Grace walked cautiously down the narrow hallway and drew back the heavy curtain covering the front door. The muffled shape was opaque through the frosted glass panel. Holding the gun securely behind her back with her right hand, she fumbled open the three sliding locks, unlocked the deadbolt and loosened the safety chain. Only then did she turn the lock and pull the door one and a half inches, the exact amount of slack given by the chain.

'Sorry to bother you,' the woman said, her teeth chattering. She raised her phone. 'My car has broken down. Can I borrow your phone to call my husband, please? I can't get a signal on my mobile.'

Not surprising, Grace thought. Most of the mobile networks struggled for a signal in this small Cornish village. Luckily, her landline worked fine.

She perused the stranger for longer than was polite. The woman was a good four inches shorter than Grace and, beneath the thick clothing, only a slight thing. What she could see of her face was red from the cold.

Rationally she knew this stranger could not pose a threat. Even so...

Even so, her mind raced as she thought of a whole posse of reasons as to why it was impossible to let her in to make her call and then offer the hospitality of warmth from the ever-constant cast-iron cooker in the kitchen.

Much as she knew she should slam the door in the stranger's face and direct her to the farmhouse at the top of the drive, she could not bring herself to be so uncharitable. It would be at least another ten-minute walk for the poor thing.

'Hold on a sec,' she said, shutting the door. She stuffed the gun into the deep pocket of her dressing gown, a place she knew topped the list of most stupid places to hide a firearm. She had no choice but to place it there.

Stupid, paranoid mind. You've been hiding for too long. Can't even open a door without expecting an ambush.

She unlocked the chain and opened the door.

'Thank you so much,' the woman said, stepping straight in and stamping her feet on the welcome mat to shake off the early-morning frost clinging to them. 'I was starting to think I'd never find civilisation. The roads around here are dreadful.'

Grace forced a polite smile and shut the door behind her. The cold had already rushed into the heavily insulated house. A cold, uneasy feeling swept through her, a feeling she disregarded.

'The phone's right here,' she said, indicating the land-line on the small table by the front door. 'Help yourself.'

The woman lifted the receiver and made her call, pressing a finger to her ear and speaking in a low murmur.

The conversation went on for a good few minutes. When she finished, the woman put the receiver back on the cradle and smiled at Grace. The smile didn't quite meet her eyes. 'Thanks for that. I'll get out of your hair now.'

'You're welcome to wait here for your husband,' Grace said, hating the thought of anyone being outside in such awful conditions.

'No. I need to go. He won't be long.'

'Are you sure? It's horrid out there.'

The woman backed up to the front door and reached for the handle. 'I'm sure. Thank you.' She opened the door and headed off down the driveway without so much as a goodbye.

Perplexed, Grace stared at the rapidly retreating figure for a few seconds before shutting the door and relocking it. She shivered.

The hairs on her arms were standing to attention again. It took a few beats before she recognised the coldness in her bones as a warning and not a pure physical reaction.

Something was off...

Standing stock-still, she strained her ears. The only noise she could detect was the thundering of her own blood careering through her at the rate of knots.

Stupid, paranoid mind.

All the same, something about the stranger's demeanour played on her mind. As she padded back to the kitchen, all she could think about was the way the woman had rushed off.

The shock of the doorbell ringing a short while earlier was nothing compared to the floor-rooting terror of finding the tall, darkly handsome man in her kitchen, a man flanked by two gorilla-resembling goons.

'Wait in the car for me,' he said to them, not taking his eyes off Grace.

The goons left immediately, departing through the back door, the same door that had been locked just ten minutes earlier.

'Good morning, *bella*.'

Bella. The way that one particular word tripped off his tongue like a caress paralysed her. The drumming in her heart was instantaneous, a memory flickering back to life at the first sound of his voice. A beautiful, velvety rich voice with a heavy Sicilian accent that made his English sing.

The drumming became a loud pump. The paralysis was replaced with a fizzing energy that cleared her head of the fog that had filled it. Without taking her eyes off him, she slid her hand into her pocket and pulled out the gun.

'I'm going to give you five seconds to get out of my house.'

Only by the tiniest flicker of a thick black eyebrow did Luca react to having a gun aimed at his chest. His firm lips twitched as he lazily placed his hands in the air. 'Or what? You'll shoot me?'

'Don't move,' she snapped, her eyes widening as, hands held aloft, he took a step towards her. 'Get back!'

It could almost be described as humorous that Luca, unarmed, was utterly unfazed while she, holding a lethal weapon in her hands, was cold with fear.

She doubted he had ever felt a solitary jolt of fear in his life.

She must not let panic control her. She had always known this day would come. Mentally and physically she had prepared for it.

'I said get back.' She tried to steady her grip on the gun but her hands were trembling so hard she had to use all her concentration to keep the aim straight.

'Is this how you greet all your guests, *bella*?' He cocked his head to one side and took another step towards her, then another, his deep-set eyes not moving from her face. At some point she had forgotten how mesmerising they were, how the thick black lashes framed eyes so dark she had once believed them to be black. Only upon the closest of inspections could a person see they were in fact a deep, dark blue, like a clear summer's night. And once you knew their colour you never forgot.

How vividly she recalled the first time she had seen those eyes close up. That had been the point when every cell of her body had come alive. That had been the point she had fallen helplessly in love.

But that had been a long time ago. Any love she felt for him had died ten months ago when the truth about him could no longer be denied.

'Only the uninvited ones.' Deliberately she made a big show of slipping the safety catch off the gun. 'I will tell you one last time, get out of my house.'

He had inched close enough for her to see the pulse in his temple throb. She had to get him out of the house *right now*.

'Put the gun away, Grace. You have no idea how to handle such a dangerous weapon.'

Having a gun pointed at him had not figured in any of the welcomes Luca had been expecting. His heart thundered beneath his chest and, while he did not believe she would shoot him, the last thing he wanted was to panic her into doing something beyond either of their control.

He could hardly credit that he had found her. Finally.

As soon as he had positively identified her photo, he had boarded the jet kept on permanent standby for this very purpose, and travelled straight to England.

Grace's face was void of expression. 'You have no idea what I'm capable of handling. How did you find me?'

Somehow he managed to quell the spike of rage her toneless words provoked. She could be speaking to a stranger for all the emotion she conveyed. 'With great difficulty. Now put the gun down. I only want to talk to you. Nothing more.'

She made no attempt to hide her incredulity. 'You came all this way and went to all this trouble just so you could *talk* to me? If you just wanted to talk, why not knock on the door like a normal person rather than get a stooge to distract me so you can break in through the back door?'

'Because, my clever, deceitful Grace, you have led me on a merry dance around Europe. You have gone to incredible lengths to hide from me.' So successful had she been in keeping one step ahead, he'd been ready to believe she had a magic portal to vanish with whenever he got too close. Even before he'd verified the picture was truly her, he had insisted his men keep a close watch on the house with instructions to follow her if she went anywhere. Just in case. He would not let her slip through his fingers again.

'I haven't led you anywhere. If I had wanted you to find me I would have given directions.' Keeping hold of the gun with her right hand, she wiped her left down the side of her thin dressing gown, the movement pulling it open.

Her detachment was all on the surface.

A heavy thickness settled in his blood. The long pyjama bottoms and matching vest top showed off her slender, almost androgynous figure beautifully. Yet there was something softer than he remembered about her physique, a softness not matched in the coolness of her unwavering hazel eyes.

His mouth ran dry. Wetting his lips with his tongue, he continued to scrutinise her.

She had changed so much. If he had crossed her in the street he would have likely not recognised her. This, undoubtedly, had been her intention.

He had almost disregarded the photo. It had been taken mere minutes after his men arrived and strategically placed themselves out of sight of her security cameras. She had left the house for a few moments to collect her post from the box at the bottom of her driveway, bundled up in a thick, shapeless coat. They had managed to fire off a couple of shots before she had gone back inside but only one had captured part of her face.

The angle of her head had caught his attention. As he'd studied it closely a flicker in his belly had ignited. It was Grace. It was the same angle she always tilted her head when thinking, the same angle she would strike when standing in front of a large canvas with a paintbrush in her mouth. Of course, in those days, her hair had been long. And blonde. Not the short, red pixie haircut she now sported. It was a style he should find abhorrent but on Grace he found strangely compelling. Sexy.

Very sexy.

'How was I supposed to know you didn't want to be found?' he asked coolly. 'You left without a word to me or anyone. You didn't even have the courtesy to leave a note.'

'I would have thought my silence made it clear.'

Her silence had spoken volumes. But how could he not search for her? He would have searched for ever.

This was the woman who had promised to love and honour him until death did they part, not until.

That was the precise problem. He had no idea why she had simply vanished from his life.

And he could hardly credit he was now standing less than ten feet from her.

'You didn't take any of your clothes.' She hadn't taken anything. She had gone for a walk on the estate, climbed over the fence that marked the perimeter and vanished.

'Your goons would have been suspicious if I'd wandered through the vineyard with a ruddy great suitcase.'

Was that really sarcasm he detected in her voice? From Grace?

'I knew you would try to find me. That's why I have a gun-to stop you or your men from forcing me to return. Because I tell you now, I am not setting foot in Sicily again. So, unless you want to learn for yourself how good my aim is, I suggest you leave. And put your hands back up where I can see them.'

For a moment all he could do was stare in disbelief. 'What the hell happened to you?'

Users Review

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Phillip Patten:

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