The Sinful Art of Revenge



By Maya Blake



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Taking what is rightfully his

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Reiko knows she has two things Damion wants: the first, a priceless painting and Fortier heirloom. The second, her seriously off-limits body! And she has no intention of giving him access to either.

Damion isn't used to beautiful women scorning his advances, so it's definitely time to turn his lethal charm up one last notch to ensure he gets *exactly* what he wants....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Maya Blake's writing dream started at 13. She eventually realised her dream when she received The Call in 2012. Maya lives in England with her husband, kids and an endless supply of books. Contact Maya: www.mayabauthor.blogspot.com www.twitter.com/mayablake www.facebook.com/maya.blake.94

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *After three hundred yards, turn right.*

Damion Fortier ignored the sultry voice of his satellite navigator and accelerated his Bugatti Veyron past the floodlit tree-lined lane that led to Ashton Manor. The aging Duke he'd liberally plied with Krug and caviar all evening at his exclusive London private gentlemen's club had supplied Damion with directions to a less well-known entrance to Sir Trevor Ashton's Surrey country residence—one Damion fully intended to use.

Turn around when possible.

The veiled reproach barely registered. A quarter of a mile up the road he slowed down and turned into a narrower lane. Ahead of him he could see the rear of the aging Manor. The gardens on this side of the estate were remarkably less manicured than the showcased frontage cultivated to fool the less discerning. With an impatient hand he shut off the navigator's repeated entreaty to turn around. He had reached his destination.

Satisfaction oozed through him even as confusion threaded doubt through his mind. Considering the money he'd spent to achieve what he wanted, this whole situation should have gone much more smoothly. He'd learnt very early on in life that some people responded only to cold, hard cash, and he'd expected it this time, too.

But his investigators had already been to Ashton Manor once before and been stonewalled. Which was unacceptable.

He stopped the car at the bottom of the back garden and stepped out.

Annoyance made his movements jerky as he climbed the stone steps and approached the ivy-trellised Manor. Despite being cloaked by the inky-black night, its dilapidated status couldn't be hidden.

As he drew nearer he heard female laughter, interlaced with several deeper tones. He skirted a bramblechoked rosebush and felt it snag on his trouser leg. Jaw tightening, he stared down at his ruined trousers.

He reached down to free himself and hissed with anger when a thorn bit into his thumb.

Pressing his tongue to the torn flesh to stem the blood flow, Damion stepped up to the tall double windows of the Georgian mansion. Several couples stood outside the drawing room, preparing to take their leave. It was obvious they'd been partying a while; one or two of them weren't quite steady on their feet.

Damion scanned the crowd but didn't immediately spot her.

He stepped back onto the overgrown path, abandoning his previous intention of stealth. About to stalk round

to the front of the Manor, Damion paused as a figure nudged into his peripheral vision.

Her presence was unobtrusive, her movements graceful, unhurried, intended not to draw attention to herself. And yet as if drawn by her magnetism, the group turned at her approach.

The light from the room spilled over her. The air snagged mid-breath in Damion's chest and his whole body clenched in remembrance.

On any other woman the white kimono-style gown that lightly hugged her body would have looked simple and elegant—sexy but not sexual.

But on her the body-skimming design immediately drew the eye to her plump breasts, the tiny indentation of her cinched-in waist and the voluptuous curve of her hips. Damion followed the flow of the silk dress. If his memory served him right, she would either be wearing a very tiny thong or nothing at all underneath that silk.

Recalling her proclivity for designer thongs—and how he'd been obsessed with taking them off—he felt a pulse of heat shoot through him, surprising him with it intensity.

His frowning gaze rose to her face. She wore her hair differently now. A heavy fringe slanted over one temple, covering most of the right side of her face, while the rest of her long, dark hair hung thick and luxurious down her back. Her make-up was a little more on the heavy, dramatic side than he remembered her favouring, but even without those camouflaging accessories Damion recognised her immediately. Reiko Kagawa.

The woman he'd been hunting for weeks. The woman who'd become so skilled in camouflage and subterfuge she'd eluded his security experts. And almost eluded him, too, save for a chance conversation with a drunken duke...

Damion's gaze travelled over her as she moved through the small gathering. She was still a strikingly beautiful woman. If you preferred your women pocket-Venus-size and duplicitous to the core.

People changed. He knew that. Hell, the five years since he'd last seen Reiko had taught him fresh life lessons he would willingly unlearn. But he'd never thought *she* would end up this way.

The epitome of all he despised.

Tightening his fist, he reminded himself of why he was here—because of his grandfather, the last of his blood relatives. The only one he cared enough about to put himself through this...

Damion refused to let heartache linger at the thought of what lay ahead. He would do what needed to be done for his grandfather, regardless of the personal cost to himself. Five years had passed since he'd set eyes on Reiko—five years since he'd learned that the woman he'd thought he knew was just an aberration.

This time he had his eyes wide open. And once he had what he wanted, she could go back to being a minor blip in his past.

Rounding the old Manor, he marched up the front steps.

A shiver raced down Reiko's spine a split second before the knock came. She tore her gaze from the window, where it had swung as if compelled by an unknown force.

For several moments her mind remained blank, a whisper of premonition shivering over her skin as she glanced back at the tall windows. There was nothing out there except overgrown bushes and the odd fox or two.

Yet...

The knock sounded again, followed almost immediately by the pull of the ancient doorbell no one used much any more.

Recalling that she'd sent Simpson, the day butler, home, Reiko put down the loaded tray she'd been carrying and headed towards the door. The party had been a bad idea. The financial strain alone didn't bear thinking about. But Trevor had insisted.

To keep up appearances.

Her lips twisted. She knew all about keeping up appearances; she had a master's degree in it, in fact. When she needed to, like tonight, she could smile, laugh, negotiate her way through tricky conversation, while desperately keeping a lid on the demons that strained at the leash just below the surface.

The facade was cracking. Nowadays even the little effort it took to smile drained her. And it had all started since she'd heard *he* was looking for her.

Her thoughts skated to a halt as the door flew open. The hundred-year-old oak, worn from lack of proper care, stood little chance of avoiding a collision with the stone wall.

Reiko gasped at the huge figure filling the doorway.

'There you are.' The deep, velvety voice oozed satisfaction and barely suppressed anger.

'Do you always crash your way into people's homes like some wannabe action hero?' she fired back, despite her thundering heart.

She'd feared this moment would come ever since she'd heard on the grapevine he was looking for her. That was why she never stayed in the same place for more than a few days.

A thick wave of panic rolled over her as she stared at him.

The unmistakable French accent and the air of brutal self-assuredness hadn't lessened since she'd last clapped eyes on Damion Fortier. If anything, time had added a maturity and depth to the sexy, charismatic man recently polled by French *Vogue* as the most eligible bachelor in the western hemisphere—possibly the whole frickin' world.

The Sixth Baron of St Valoire, descended from a pure line of French aristocracy, was six-foot-four-inches of swoon-worthy masculine beauty—even when in the grip of bristling fury.

Wavy hair the colour of dark chocolate grew long enough to touch the collar of his bespoke grey suit without

looking unkempt or unfashionable. Broad shoulders, honed to perfection during his rugby-playing late teens and early twenties, moved restlessly, drawing attention to their sheer width and power. But, as arresting as his body was, it was his face that captured her attention.

Reiko's art-steeped heritage, cultivated since birth and sharpened by years of apprenticeship under her late grandfather's keen tutelage, meant she could spot a true masterpiece from twenty feet—it was, after all, the reason she'd chosen her specialised profession.

Damion Fortier was the epitome of Michelangelo's *David*, his face hauntingly beautiful and yet so uniquely mysterious it drew attention and held it, commanding eyes to worship it.

As for his eyes.

They always reminded her of furious storm clouds right before thunder boomed and lightning struck. Or right before—

'Aren't you going to say hello, Reiko?'

Reiko sucked in a long breath to calm her galloping heartbeat. And another in order to find the Zen she needed to deal with the situation.

Despite the colossal trepidation accelerating through her body, she forced herself to move towards him, hand outstretched. 'Hello... Wait—shall I call you Monsieur Fortier, or do you prefer Baron?'

Without waiting, she took his hand in hers.

Face your demons—wasn't that what her therapist had told her? If she hadn't been so desperate to stay hidden, Reiko would have called her to demand her money back because so far her advice hadn't worked. If anything, the demons had grown larger.

An explosion of heat shattered her thoughts as Damion's firm fingers curled around hers. Stormy sensation fired up deeply suppressed memories, unnerving her much more than she'd expected. Desperately ignoring it, she covered their entwined hands with her other hand.

Surprise flared in his eyes at her action, as she'd known it would. Her recently learned trick always surprised when she made the bold move. Normally it disarmed long enough for her to read her opponent, to see behind the facade to the real person beneath the civilised gloss. Because, inevitably, there was *always* something else underneath.

'I'd like to be sure of the correct way to address you, since Daniel Fortman is clearly no longer an option.'

Reiko was unprepared for the stab of pain that lanced through her. She'd thought she was over this—had thought five years was enough to get over Daniel.Damion's betrayal.

But then how *could* she forget? She'd watched her grandfather wither away before her eyes, his devastation complete after Damion Fortier had been done with him.

She tried to free her fingers but he'd recovered quickly. 'What the hell do you want?' she said.

His eyes gave nothing away as he used his controlling grasp to push her back one step and nudge the door shut behind him.

'You never gave me a chance to explain-'

'When should I have let you explain? *After* your bodyguards nearly flattened my grandfather's cabin because they thought you'd been kidnapped? Or *after* your head of security inadvertently revealed that far from the casual business acquaintance I believed you to be you were in fact *Damion Fortier*—French royalty, and the man who was ruthlessly ruining the grandfather while sleeping with the granddaughter?' Pain stabbed deeper, reminding her just how blind and trusting she'd been.

'Sleeping is a very loose term, since we hardly did any in those six weeks.' His smile held a hint of flint. 'And what happened with your grandfather was just business—'

'Don't you dare try to justify it as *just business!* You took away everything he'd ever worked for, everything that mattered to him. Just so you could fatten your already bloated bank balance.'

Damion shrugged. 'He made a deal, Reiko. Then proceeded to make very bad decisions, which he tried to cover up. Because of his friendship with my grandfather, he was given more than enough time to fix the problem. He didn't. I kept my identity a secret because I didn't want things to get sentimental and messy.'

'Of course. Sentiment is so inconvenient when it comes to making money, isn't it? Do you know my grandfather died barely a month after you bankrupted him?' To this day, she couldn't get over the guilt of not seeing what was going on under her nose until it was too late. She'd been too besotted, too trusting. And she'd paid dearly.

Damion's eyes darkened and his grip tightened around hers.

'Reiko—'

'Can you cut to the chase, please, Baron? I'm sure you didn't pursue me for weeks just to reminisce about the past.' A past she never thought of during her wakeful hours but which had recently blended itself into her nightmares.

His eyes narrowed. 'You knew I was looking for you?'

Reiko forced a smile despite the fresh wave of anxiety that coursed through her. 'Of course. It's been fun watching your security experts' antics. They even came close a few times—Honduras especially.'

'You think this is a game?'

Her heart clenched. 'I have no idea what *this* is. The sooner you enlighten me, the sooner you can get out of my life.' He seemed lost for several seconds, his gaze lightening then darkening as it scoured her face. Finally his lips firmed, as if he wanted to stem what he was about to say. 'I need you.'

Reiko stared blankly, tried very hard not to swallow, sure he'd see her unease in that simple act. But it was hard not to. 'You...need...me?'

In all the feverish scenarios she'd enacted, this hadn't even occurred to her. After all, what could Damion

Fortier possibly want with her, after using and discarding her like a piece of garbage?

His grip altered, and the slide of his palm against hers sent another pulse of heat up her arm. Reiko glanced down at their entwined hands and felt a knot tighten in her belly. This hadn't been such a bright idea after all. Rather than throwing him off guard, *she* felt at a disadvantage.

'Let me rephrase that. I need your *expertise''* That was more like it. 'Careful, Baron, your sneer isn't exactly endearing. It's taken you weeks to find me. The least you can do is be civil. Otherwise next time I may not be so easy to find.'

'For that to happen I'd have to let you out of my sight. And I have no intention of doing so. As for being civil—I must admit that's a little lower on my list right at this moment.'

She shrugged. 'Well, you can leave, or I can call the police and have you arrested for trespass.'

Intense eyes narrowed. 'That would be a mistake.'

Her smile widened. 'I'm quite happy to let them decide.'

Without releasing her, he extracted his BlackBerry from his pocket and held it out to her. 'Bien sur-make the call.'

Despite her smile staying put, she shuddered. The police were the last people she wanted to be dealing with. 'You don't mean that.'

'I'm prepared to accept a charge for trespass. Are *you* prepared for me to hand over the interesting facts I've gathered on you to them?'

Her fingers jerked within his grasp. To cover the telling reaction, she pressed her palm closer to his. His eyes widened, the grey darkening a touch as his gaze dropped to their entwined fingers.

Despite everything screaming at her to run in the opposite direction, Reiko went one better. Reaching out, she clasped his elbow. His head jerked up, his gaze snagging and holding hers prisoner, his brow furrowing in an attempt to read her.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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