

Mills & Boon – Winner

“My god, I’ve slept in! And today of all days!” gasped Michelle, glaring at the alarm clock as she leapt out of bed.

This was her first day in charge of the office while Brian, her boss and fiancé of five days – attended a conference in Paris.

“I wish I could take you with me”, he whispered last night, nuzzling her hair, “but I need somebody here I can trust – you do understand?”

Michelle nodded, ignoring the twinge of disappointment. Brian could trust her – in charge!

“And here I am”, she thought despairingly, as she speed showered”, already running late on my first day”.

She raked the brush through her long blonde hair, fed the cat, threw on her smartest suit, downed a scalding coffee, fed the cat again.

“Really, Ebenezer! Do you never get enough?” She muttered crossly as his black silky body twined round her ankles.

Then, a whirling windmill of arms, jacket, bag, scarf she raced down the track from her cottage as the bus appeared on the far side of the valley.

“Two minutes! I’ll make it!”

And she might have done, had not a Range Rover appeared out of nowhere in the winter morning half-light, completely drenching her in muddy water.

“Just what ... just where the hell do you think you’re going – on my private road?” she spluttered, as the door opened and a deeply tanned dark haired man in a thick white polo neck jumper and well cut jeans stepped out.

Barbara Fraser

The Equinox – Runner Up

Three o'clock.

The sun stood high, bright in the clear blue Shetland sky. Unseasonably warm and dry for September, Dougie Park was taking full advantage of all that working out of doors had to offer. Stripped down to his faded blue jeans and steel toe-capped boots, Dougie stood from today's task of turning the last of the season's hay crop.

Hands on hips Dougie leaned back, easing the crick from his back. Small beads of sweat glistened on his forehead and tanned, muscular back. The smattering of hair on his chest intriguingly made an almost perfect inverted triangle...

Grasping the hay fork once more, Dougie ran his large hands, calloused yet gentle, along the shaft of a fork worn smooth by the hands of generations before him. Dougie's land, and the land of his fore fathers, ran to 20 acres. Casting his eyes around him, surveying what was his, Dougie's gaze strayed to a small house in the distance.

Shielding his eyes from the sun Dougie could just make out the two figures in the garden. The Sinclair sisters! Moragan, feisty, with a quick wit and temper that matched her flaming red hair, and Ailee, dark, exotic, mysterious, rumoured not to be of pure Shetland blood. Thinking of Ailee, Dougie's fingers tightened on the shaft of the fork. Letting his mind stray, he wondered what it would be like to run his hands through her silky raven hair and over her smooth skin.

"Dougie?"

"Dougie?"

Stopping at the brow of the hill, Karie looked down and saw that Dougie had not heard her call. Setting down her basket of tea and flapjacks, baked fresh that morning, Karie let her gaze drift over Dougie's lean, bronzed body. Licking her lips, Karie felt a familiar warming within and could almost taste the salty sweetness of Dougie's sweat. The sweat she loved to lick from his body...

Nicola Sinclair

Editor's note: Nicola's entry has been censored slightly as this is a family website! She has however, written an excellent attempt at one of Mills and Boons' red-covered 'Blaze' editions, which are designed to be a little racier than the norm!

Mills and Boon: Highly commended

Lucretia's throat tightened and she felt her life's breath leaving her body. Mournful hunting horns and squawking fiddles combined with the heady aroma of paraffin, sweat and the vapour from ill-concealed hip flasks announced that the man of the moment was here, her man, or was he? The Guizer Jarl, Hosea Ridland. He emerged at the door of the hall, his chiselled and unusually beardless features amplified by the flattering sheen of his breastplate and the strong overhead lighting of the hall reflecting in his domed helmet rendered him for all the world more like a well turned futuristic standard lamp than the fearless warrior he purported to represent. No matter, he thought, this was his night and, as she caught sight of Lucretia eagerly clapping and singing along to the squad song "The Lion Sleeps Tonight", he knew that she knew that he had chosen that song for her and he meant to claim her this evening. Lucretia shivered slightly with anticipation as Hosea concluded his thanks to the hosts, insultingly brief as it was due to his desperation to reach his woman. As she turned towards him, arms outstretched to gather him home, out of the corner of her eye she spied Gideon Erasumson, dressed in a pink tutu and squashed incongruously on a crowded bench between a very tipsy Teletubby and a scantily clad teenager intent on relieving Tubby of his green head before he spewed in it. Gideon rose and carefully picked his way towards Lucretia, his gaze cold. That his target was Hosea there could be no doubt. What felt like an electric shock pulsed through Lucretia and a moment's hesitation on her part was sufficient to allow the well upholstered Chief Hostess Evangeline Irvine to insert her not inconsiderable sequin encased bosom in front of Hosea to demand that he accompany her to the Hostess's room for refreshments. Gideon! Gideon! Lucretia thought was rising panic. What was he doing here? He said he wasn't going out this year. What did he say when he phoned last night – if she couldn't be at the Hall as his fiancée then he would not be there. And Hosea? Did he know about Hosea? How could he know? In the instant that these thoughts sliced through her brain Gideon had bowled aside Evangeline who in her turn took out Sir Emmett Digby-Jamieson, the puce faced Home Counties MP of tenuous island connections who had slithered through the throng to ensure a photo opportunity with the Jarl and now found himself on the deck, buried not unhappily in Evangeline's embonpoint as she squeaked shrilly for assistance. Gideon grasped clumsily at Hosea's shoulder and, reaching it, twisted him sharply round to face him. Hosea gasped but before the Anglo-Saxon expletive forming on his lips could be articulated Gideon reached for Hosea's throat and, squeezing hard, spat "Boy, dey shoulda sent dee ta Valhalla da night right enough!"

Mandy Phillips

Spring 1845: Highly commended

The stranger stood on the hilltop and surveyed the valley before him. Despite the familiarity of the scene, some things had changed in his absence. The small stone croft house where he had once lived with his mother and younger brother James lay in ruins, and other houses had sprung up beyond it. Cultivated land stretched where once there had only been hills and sheep.

He began his journey down towards the small township, which seemed deserted save for a solitary dog barking. Only the thin plumes of smoke rising from the chimneys indicated that there was life in the houses.

Then he saw her. She was standing by the byre, a basket of peats balanced on her hip as she secured the door latch. As he approached, he saw that she was older than when he last saw her, and the first streaks of grey had appeared in her once raven hair.

“Margaret”, he whispered, then repeated her name louder as she turned and saw him. Her mouth fell open, as if she had seen a ghost, and she dropped the basket and let out a little cry.

He ran towards her, stumbling over the rough grass, his arms outstretched. She stood motionless, still unable to believe what she was seeing.

He reached her and embraced her with the tenacity of a drowning man grasping at a rock. Drawing back slightly, he gazed longingly into her bewildered eyes.

Morag Nicolson