


# Just One Last Night

*By Helen Brooks*

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Discovering Melanie is pregnant with his child pushes Forde Masterson to his limits. As Christmas approaches, he vows to reclaim his wife and child even if that means playing dirty…with a sensual onslaught so powerful that come Christmas Day, she will never want to leave his arms again!

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## Editorial Review

About the Author
Helen Brooks began writing in 1990 as she approached her 40th birthday! She realized her two teenage ambitions (writing a novel and learning to drive) had been lost amid babies and hectic family life, so set about resurrecting them. In her spare time she enjoys sitting in her wonderfully therapeutic, rambling old garden in the sun with a glass of red wine (under the guise of resting while thinking of course). Helen lives in Northampton, England with her husband and family.

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Melanie stared at the letter in her hand. The heavy black scrawl danced before her eyes and she had to blink a few times before reading it again, unable to believe what her brain was telling her.

Didn't Forde understand that this was impossible? Absolutely ridiculous? In fact it was so nonsensical she read the letter a third time to convince herself she wasn't dreaming. She had recognised his handwriting as soon as she'd picked the post off the mat and her heart had somersaulted, but she'd imagined he was writing about something to do with their divorce. Instead…

Melanie breathed in deeply, telling herself to calm down.

Instead Forde had written to ask her to consider doing some work for him. Well, not him exactly, she conceded reluctantly. His mother. But it was part and parcel of the same thing. They hadn't spoken in months and then, cool as a cucumber, he wrote out of the blue. Only Forde Masterson could be so spectacularly outrageous. He was unbelievable. Utterly unbelievable.

She threw the letter onto the table and began to open the rest of the post, finishing her toast and coffee as she did so. Her small dining room doubled as her office, an arrangement that had its drawbacks if she wanted to invite friends round for a meal. Not that she had time for a social life anyway. Since leaving Forde a few weeks into the new year, she'd put all her energy into building up the landscape design company she had started twelve months after they'd married, just after—

A shutter shot down in her mind with the inflexibility of solid steel. That time was somewhere she didn't go, had never gone since leaving Forde. It was better that way.

The correspondence dealt with, Melanie finished the last of her first pot of coffee of the day and went upstairs to her tiny bathroom to shower and get dressed before she rang James, her very able assistant, to go through what was required that day. James was a great employee inasmuch as he was full of enthusiasm and a tirelessly hard worker, but with his big-muscled body and dark good looks he attracted women like bees to a honeypot. He often turned up in the morning looking a little the worse for wear. However, it never affected his work and Melanie had no complaints.

Clad in her working clothes of denim jeans and a vest top, Melanie looped her thick, shoulder-length ash-blonde hair into a ponytail and applied plenty of sunscreen to her pale, easily burned english skin. The country was currently enjoying a heatwave and the August day was already hot at eight in the morning.

Before going downstairs again, she flung open her bedroom window and let the rich scent of the climbing roses outside fill the room. The cottage was tiny—just her bedroom and a separate bathroom upstairs, and a

pocket-size sitting room and the dining room downstairs, the latter opening into a new extension housing a kitchen overlooking the minute courtyard garden. But Melanie loved it. The courtyard's dry stone walls were hidden beneath climbing roses and honeysuckle, which covered the walls at the back of the cottage too, and the paved area that housed her small bistro table and two chairs was a blaze of colour from the flowering pots surrounding its perimeter. In the evenings it was bliss to eat her evening meal out there in the warm, soft air with just the twittering of the birds and odd bee or butterfly for company. It wasn't too extreme to say this little cottage had saved her sanity in the first cru-cifyingly painful days after she'd fled the palatial home she'd shared with Forde.

The cottage was one in the middle of a terrace of ten, all occupied by couples or single folk and half of them—like the ones either side of Melanie—used as weekend bolt-holes by london high-flyers who retreated to the more gentle pace of life south-west of the capital, where the villages and towns still retained an olde-worlde charm. It was also sixty miles or so distant from Forde's house in Kingston upon Thames, sufficient mileage, Melanie had felt, to avoid the prospect of running into him by chance.

She had wondered if her fledgling business would survive when she'd moved, but in actual fact it had thrived so well she had been able to take on James within a month or two of leaving the city. The nature of the work had changed a little; when she had been based in Kingston upon Thames she'd been involved with the layout of housing areas with play facilities and general urban regeneration. Now it was mostly public and private garden work, along with forest landscaping and land reclamation. Some of the time she and James worked with members of a team that could include architects, planners, civil engineers and quantity surveyors depending upon what the job involved. On other projects they worked in isolation on private gardens or country estates. Inevitably office work was part of the deal, along with site visits and checking progress of work where other bodies were involved.

Becoming aware she was in danger of daydreaming, Melanie turned away from the window, her mind jumping into gear and detailing what the day involved.

James was due to oversee the bulldozing of a number of ancient pigsties, which the client wanted transformed into a wild flower garden, being concerned about the loss of natural habitats in the countryside in general and in the surrounding area of the old farmhouse he'd bought in particular. Melanie had suggested a meadow effect, created with a profusion of wild flowers growing in turf on soil that was low in fertility, the mowing regime of which had to allow the flowers to seed before being cut.

In stark contrast, she was off to put the finishing touches to a formal garden she and James had been working on for three weeks. It was a place of calm order, expressed in a carefully balanced treatment of space and symmetry, the details of which had been all-important. The retired bank manager and his wife who had purchased the property recently in the midst of a small country town had been delighted with her initial plan of a neat lawn and matching paved areas at either end of the grass, clipped bushes and trained plants—along with fruit trees in restricted shapes—providing a gentle approach to the precise layout they'd first requested.

*She loved her job.* Melanie breathed a silent prayer of thankfulness. Devising a personal creation for each individual client was so satisfying, along with reconciling their ideas with the practical potential of the available plot. Not that this was always easy, especially if a client had seen their 'perfect' garden in a magazine or brochure, which inevitably was bigger or smaller than the space they had available. But then that was part of the challenge and fun.

Half smiling to herself as her mind skimmed over several such past clients, Melanie made her way downstairs, pausing at the door to the dining room. It was only then she acknowledged that since reading

Forde's letter, every single word had been burning in her brain.

*Dear Melanie, I'm writing to ask a favour, not for myself but for Isabelle.*

Typical Forde, she thought darkly, her heart thudding as she glanced at the letter lying on the table. No 'how are you?' or any other such social nicety. Just straight to the point.

*She hasn't been too well lately and the garden at Hillview is too much for her, not that she would ever admit it. The whole thing needs complete changing with an emphasis on low maintenance now she's nearly eighty. The trouble is she won't even allow a gardener onto the premises so I've no chance of persuading her to let strangers do an overhaul. But she'd trust you. Think about it, would you? And ring me. Forde*

Think about it! Melanie shook her head. She didn't have to think about it to know what she was going to do, and there was no way she was going to ring Forde either. She had insisted on no contact between them and that still held.

Walking over to the table, she picked up the piece of paper and the envelope and ripped them into small pieces, throwing the fragments into the bin. There. Finished with. She had enough to do today without thinking about Forde and his ridiculous request.

She stood for a moment more, staring into space. What did he mean when he'd said Isabelle hadn't been well? She pictured Forde's sweet-faced mother in her mind as her heart lurched. It had been almost as bad walking out of Isabelle's life as that of her son all those months ago, but she had known all threads holding her to Forde had to be severed if she had any chance of making it. She'd written a brief note to her mother-in-law, making it clear she didn't expect Isabelle to understand but that she'd had good reasons for doing what she'd done and that it hadn't altered the genuine love and respect she had for the older woman. She had asked Isabelle not to reply. When she had, Melanie had returned the letter unopened. It had torn her in two to do it, but she hadn't doubted it was the right decision. She wouldn't put Isabelle in the position of piggy-in-the-middle. Isabelle adored Forde, an only child, and mother and son were closer than most, Forde's father having died when Forde was in his late teens.

Her mobile ringing brought her out of her reverie. It was James. There had been a bad accident just in front of him and he was stuck in a traffic jam that went back for miles so he was going to be late getting to the site. Was it possible she could go there and detail to the workmen exactly what needed to be done and get them started before she went on to her own job? They had the plan of work on paper but there was nothing like face-to-face instructions.

Melanie agreed. After a disaster on an early job when a perfectly sound conservatory had been demolished and the old ramshackle greenhouse had been left intact, she didn't trust workmen to take the time to read plans, and this was something she'd drummed into James from the start.

Sighing, she mentally revised her morning, decided to leave straight away rather than see to a pile of paperwork she'd hoped to sort out before she left the house, and within a few minutes was travelling towards the farmhouse in her old pickup truck. It was going to be a hectic day but that was good—if nothing else, of necessity she wouldn't have time to think about Forde's letter.

It *was* a hectic day. Melanie arrived home in deep twilight but with a big, fat cheque in her pocket from the retired couple who had been thrilled how their garden had come together. After sliding the truck into the parking space reserved for her in the square cobbled yard at one side of the row of cottages, she walked

along the narrow pathway that led off the yard and along the back of the cottages, pausing at the small doorway in the long, ivy-festooned wall that led into her tiny garden. Unlocking the door, she stepped into her small haven of peace, breathing in the delicious perfume of the roses adorning the walls. She was home, and she wanted nothing more than a long, hot bath to relax her aching muscles. She had been determined to finish the job on schedule today and hadn't even stopped for a bite of lunch.

Locking the garden door, she entered the house through the kitchen as she did most days, slipping off the thick walking boots she wore on a job and leaving them on the cork mat ready for morning. Barefoot, she padded upstairs, flinging open the bathroom window so the scents of the garden could fill the room, and began to run the bath before going into the bedroom and divesting herself of her clothes.

Two minutes later she was lying in hot, soapy bubbles gazing up at a charcoal sky in which the first stars were peeping. Not for the first time she blessed the fact that the developers who had renovated the string of cottages had had soul. In placing the big, cast-iron bath under the window as they had, it meant the occupier could lie and see an ever-changing picture in the heavens through the clear glass they'd installed. Melanie never closed the blinds until she was ready to get out of the bath and on occasions like tonight, when she was tired and aching, it was bliss to lie in the dark and think of nothing. Although tonight the carefully cultivated trick of emptying her mind and totally relaxing wasn't working…

Melanie frowned, acknowledging Forde had persistently been battering at the door to her consciousness all day, however much she had tried to ignore him. And she had tried. How she'd tried. She didn't *want* any contact with him, however remote. She didn't *want* to have him invading her mind and unsettling her. He, and Isabelle too, for that matter, were the past, there was no place for them in the present and less still in the future. This was a matter of self-survival.

She heard the telephone ring downstairs but let the answer machine take a message. Forcing her tight muscles to relax, limb by limb, she slid further into the silky water, shutting her eyes. After a few minutes her mobile began playing its little tune from the pocket of her working jeans in the bedroom. It was probably James, reporting how his day had gone, but she made no attempt to find out. This was *her* time, she told herself militantly. The rest of the world could take a hike for a while.

It was another half an hour before she climbed out of the bath, and the house phone had taken another two messages by then. After washing her hair and swathing it on top of her head with a small fluffy towel, she slipped on her bathrobe. Her stomach was reminding her she hadn't eaten since the two slices of toast at breakfast, and, deciding food was a priority, she didn't bother to get dressed, making her way downstairs just as she was.

She had reached the bottom step and her tiny square of hall when a sharp knock at the front door caused Melanie to nearly jump out of her skin.

What now? She shut her eyes for an infinitesimal moment. It could only be James reporting some disaster or other after he'd been unable to reach her by phone. And that was fine, she was his boss after all, but she really had wanted to simply crash tonight. It was clearly too much to ask.

Wiping her face clear of all irritation and stitching a smile in place, she tightened the belt of her bathrobe and then opened the door.

The six-foot-four, ruggedly handsome male standing on her doorstep wasn't James.

A bolt of shock shot through her and then she froze.

'Hi.' Forde didn't smile. 'Am I interrupting something?'

'What?' She gazed at him stupidly. He looked wonderful. White shirt, black jeans, a muscled tower of brooding masculinity.

## Users Review

**From reader reviews:**

**Corrina Sutton:**

This Just One Last Night book is simply not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you have by reading this book is usually information inside this guide incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. That Just One Last Night without we recognize teach the one who looking at it become critical in thinking and analyzing. Don't end up being worry Just One Last Night can bring any time you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it within your lovely laptop even telephone. This Just One Last Night having fine arrangement in word and layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

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**Sharon Works:**

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