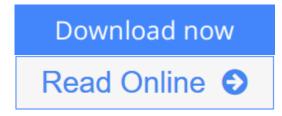


The English Lord's Secret Son

By Margaret Way



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When a chance meeting in Sydney sees their paths cross once more, neither can deny the unwavering intensity of their love. But first Cate and Ashe must revisit the ghosts of their past. And Cate's revelation is about to change everything....



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Margaret Way was born in the City of Brisbane. A Conservatorium trained pianist, teacher, accompanist and vocal coach, her musical career came to an unexpected end when she took up writing, initially as a fun thing to do. She currently lives in a harbourside apartment at beautiful Raby Bay, where she loves dining all fresco on her plant-filled balcony, that overlooks the marina. No one and nothing is a rush so she finds the laid-back Village atmosphere very conducive to her writing

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Seven-year-old Jules slapped a fist into his palm as Cate nosed the Beemer into the parking space vacated by a runabout so compact it could fit into the owner's pocket.

"Good one, Mum," he whooped.

"Talk about perfect timing!" Cate Hamilton had come to rely on her parking skills. At times like this they proved invaluable.

"That was ace!"

Ace had taken over from the battered awesome. Jules always liked to keep a pace ahead.

"Noah really looks up to you, Mum." It was a source of pride to him. Noah, his best friend, was seriously impressed by Cate's driving. Noah's mother, a nice lady, had the really scary knack of either side swiping vehicles or on occasions reversing into them. She should have had a number plate bearing the warning: WATCH OUT. There were always scrapes and dents on their silver Volvo. Repairs were carried out. Back to Square One. It was a pattern pretty well set. Noah said his mother didn't know *how* to explain it. His father had a hard time understanding it as well.

So did Cate. She often had coffee with Noah's mother, who was a bright, intelligent woman, right on the ball, apart from her driving habits. She switched off the ignition, eyeing the busy road. At this time of the morning there were cars everywhere, causing a worrying amount of chaos. There didn't appear to be any order on the part of the drivers. She had even begun to question the safety of the pedestrian crossing. People appeared to be in such a desperate hurry these days. Where were they going? What was so important every nanosecond counted? Surely nothing could be more important than the safety of a child? The difficulty was, parking spots were at a premium for the junior school. Small children, even big children, didn't leg it to school these days. They didn't even bus it. They were driven to and fro by their parents. Different times, worrying times. Or maybe that perception was a beat up by a media who seized on anything when there was a dearth of stories.

A recent coverage featured an attempted snatching of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl. Even the police had been sucked in for a while until a child psychologist in their ranks pointed out thirteen-year-old girls were known to have a burgeoning need for attention. Some were more demanding and more inventive than others. That particular young lady had a future writing fiction.

Cate glanced at her son's glowing face. The most beautiful face in the whole wide world to her. Not only beautiful, Jules was *smart*, really smart. Her one and only child. Pure and innocent. Her sun, moon and stars. Cate relished the moment of real joy, lifting a hand to acknowledge a departing driver, another mother, who

fluttered curling, separated fingers in response.

It was a beautiful day, so bright and full of promise. A great time to be alive. Scent of trees. Scent of flowers, the heat amplifying the myriad scents to incense. Tangy taste of salt off Sydney Harbour. The Harbour, the most beautiful natural harbour in the world, made a splendid contribution to Sydney's scenic beauty. No wonder Sydney was regularly featured as one of the world's most beautiful and liveable cities. Few cities could boast such a glorious environment, a dazzling blue and gold world, with hundreds of bays and beaches of white sands, magical coves and waterways for its citizens to enjoy. To Sydneysiders it was a privilege to live within easy distance of the sparkling Pacific Ocean. Even the trip to school was a heart-lifting experience.

The great jacaranda trees that lined Kingsley Avenue on both sides were in full bloom. She recalled as a student it was a superstition among them that if a jacaranda blossom fell on one's head, one would pass one's exams. A fanciful notion and, like all fanciful notions, not one to count on. Nothing in life was as simple as that. Blossoms fell indiscriminately on heads all the time. This morning there were circular lavender carpets around the trunks, with spent blossoms fanning out across the pavement and the road.

Cate turned off the ignition. Only a short time to go now before term was over. The long Christmas vacation lay ahead.

Christmas.

Out of the blue her mind gave way to memories. She could never predict when they would invade her consciousness, frame by frame, unstoppable now, near obscuring her vision. A moment before she had been celebrating life. Now was not the time to allow dark thoughts to kick in. Yet inexorably she found herself going back in time to a place she knew from bitter experience was no place to go. Christmas across the world where it snowed instead of rained mauve blossom; where snow blanketed roofs and gardens, and frosted the trees, their skeletal branches outlined in white. For all the frigid air it was a world transformed. A fairy land.

Another time. Another place...

She had turned eighteen, an innocent at large, at the happiest, most exciting time of her young life, when the road ahead offered nothing but promise. She had thought at the time her guardian angel had to be watching over her, because it was then she fell helplessly, hopelessly, in love. The miracle of Destiny. She had revelled in the magic for long dreamlike months before all her happiness had been cruelly snatched away. *Overnight*.

How was one supposed to respond to having one's heart broken? Not just broken, trampled on with feet that came down hard. What had been required of her was to absorb the terrible loss and disappear like a puff of smoke.

A Housman poem had run continuously in her head for years.

Give crowns and pounds and guineas But not your heart away.

She had come to think of it as her theme song. She had given her heart away and given it in vain. She had learned a hard lesson—were there any better?—there were never guarantees when two people fell in love. What was love anyway between a man and a woman? A period of mesmerising madness? A period of lust, a desperation to assuage a physical hunger, without a single thought as to looking deeper for longer-lasting qualities? Just how many people were blessed with the sort of love that endured? Love for *life*. Was that too much to expect given the fickleness and limited attention span of human nature? Far too many suffered the

sort of love that vanished as suddenly as it arrived. A case of love running out.

Or in my case, without warning, a changing course.

These days she was back to loving Christmas, indeed the whole festive season. The arrival of Jules had miraculously put her world to rights. She could see the big picture as she had never done before. From the instant he had been placed on her breast, he had become the most important person in the world to her. No love like a mother's love. No passion as strong. His impact on her very existence was profound. She no longer focused on herself and her pain. She had a *son* to focus on. She knew from experience children raised by a single parent, usually the mother, needed that parent to play dual roles, mother and father. She had read publications from eminent people in the field that had arrived at the conclusion children from the nuclear middle-class family, mum and dad, with a bit of money, fared much better in life than children raised by single parents. While she respected the findings she had seen plenty of kids from affluent homes with both parents to care for them run off the rails. On the other hand, she had seen many success stories of people who had grown up in single-parent homes with very little money to spare. Wanting something better was a great driving force. So as far as she was concerned there were two sides to the issue. She was definitely on the side of the single parents and their difficult, challenging role.

She and Julian had a very special relationship in the best and brightest way. She couldn't really say she'd had to work at it. They had loved one another on sight, neither wanting to offer the least little bit of hurt or upset to the other. It might have been a support programme between mother and son. It had worked beautifully.

Other cars were cruising the avenue, looking for a parking spot. A late-model Mercedes shamelessly double parked to take advantage of the fact she might soon be leaving. They were a few metres from the gates of one of the country's top-ranked boys' schools, Kingsley College. The school buildings of dressed stone were regarded by all as exceptionally fine. The grounds were meticulously maintained with great sweeps of emerald green lawn, and a meld of magnificent shade trees. Parents were proud to be able to send their sons there, even if in some cases the fees almost broke the bank.

Thankfully they had found their parking spot when she was really pressed for time. She had received a text message to the effect a meeting with a potential client had been called for first thing in the morning. No name was mentioned.

Briskly Cate bent over to kiss the top of her son's blond head, taking enormous pleasure in the scent of him. His hair was so thick and soft it cushioned her lips. "Love you, darling," she said from the depths of her heart. Ah, the passage of time! She had visions of Jules as the most adorable baby in the world. Jules as a toddler. It seemed only the other day since he had taken his first steps. Wonder of wonders it had been a Sunday and she was at home. She was convinced he had delayed the momentous event so she could witness it; so she could be there for him to half run, half stumble into her waiting arms. Surely it wasn't that long since he had turned four and she had put on a big birthday party with clowns and rides on a darling little Shetland pony in the grounds? It had to be only a few *months* since he had lost his first baby tooth heralding the arrival of the tooth fairy? Time was so precious and Time was passing far too quickly. Her son was being shaped and developed before her eyes. He was rapidly turning into a questioning child, looking at the world from his own perspective.

"Love		

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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