



The Christmas Secret

Karen Swan

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Set on the beautiful island of Islay, *The Christmas Secret* is a gripping story filled with emotion from Karen Swan, author of *Christmas Under the Stars*

Alex Hyde is the leaders' leader. An executive coach par excellence, she's the person the Great and the Good turn to when the pressure gets too much; she can change the way they think, how they operate, she can turn around the very fortunes of their companies.

Her waiting list is months' long, but even she can't turn down the unorthodox but highly lucrative crisis call that comes her way a few weeks before Christmas, regarding the troublesome – and troubled – head of an esteemed whisky company in Scotland: Lochlan Farquhar, CEO of Kentallen Distilleries, is a maverick, an enigma and a renegade, and Alex needs to get inside his head before he brings the company to its knees.

It should be business as usual. She can do this in her sleep. Only, when she gets to the remote island of Islay, with the winter snows falling, Alex finds herself out of her comfort zone. For once, she's not in control - Lochlan, though darkly charismatic, is unpredictable and destructive, her usual methods gaining no traction with him - and with Christmas and her deadline fast approaching, she must win his trust and find a way to close on this deal.

But as she pulls ever closer to him, boundaries become blurred, loyalties loosen and Alex finds herself faced with an impossible choice as she realizes nothing and no-one is as they first seemed.

'Fun and great escapism' Tracy Rees, author of *The Hourglass*

'I devoured it like a tray of warm mince pies. A delicious winter tale' Sarah Morgan, bestselling author of *Moonlight Over Manhattan*

'I highly recommend this book to you – Karen Swan at her best, and there really wouldn't be Christmas without a new Karen Swan!' Onmybookshelf blog

The Christmas Secret Details

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From Reader Review The Christmas Secret for online ebook

Melissa (Corrupted BY Smut) says

let me just say now that I have put this author at the top of "authors I just read" pile!! I loved every second of this one and while I COMPLETELY loved "Christmas Under The Stars", I have to say I loved this one even more because of the enemies to lovers storyline! Basically, Alex Hyde is a business coach who is EXTREMELY good at her job and is hired to go to a scotch distillery in a small town in Scotland to help "manage" the very hostile CEO of the company who is seen to be putting the company at risk. And enter Lochlan Farquhar ????? the perfectly brooding, angry, sarcastic, beautiful asshole who resents Alex's presence. NEEDLESS to say.... I LOVE THEM I LOVE THEM I LOVE THEM! And I just love this entire book! I really enjoyed how it goes back into the past, during the first world war, who's characters hold one of the secrets of the entire book (which is actually partially based on true events I found out and thought was really neat) and I now need to travel to Scotland during Christmas time because it seems like it would be so incredibly beautiful!! Honestly, I think this book has so much potential to become a Christmas movie, and would become one of my favourites like The Holiday or Love Actually. Seriously such a good book and I'm so excited to complete my mission of reading everything Karen Swan writes! 5 stars from me!

Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

*<https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

The festive season is fast approaching and that means there are some fantastic Christmas themed books about to be released to help us get into the Christmas spirit. Karen Swan is an author who is well known for her Christmas themed novels and she returns this year with a brand new release, The Christmas Secret.

The remote island of Islay is the festive backdrop to Karen Swan's latest novel, The Christmas Secret. When career woman Alex Hyde answers the desperate call a few weeks out from Christmas from a whisky distillery in Scotland regarding their wild CEO Lochlan Farquhar, she feels compelled to help the fledgling company. Alex is the person company's turn to in times of crisis. Alex is able to offer strategies, support and wise business decisions when times are tough. Alex thinks this case will be a walk in the park but she is soon proven wrong. She quickly discovers Lochlan, the maverick CEO and perhaps the source Kentallen Distilleries troubles, is difficult to tame, let alone pin down to close her business deal. With a deadline to contend with and the Christmas period fast approaching, Alex must summon all the strength she can to save herself and Kentallen from ruin. Memories from the past, buried secrets, trust and loyalty all form part of Alex's journey to restore Kentallen and its CEO to an equilibrium. Alex's time in Islay is an unforgettable one, which will force her to make big choices and connections she never thought she would be faced with at this remote location.

There is nothing better than settling down to a festive themed read in the weeks building up to Christmas. Karen Swan's backlist features some fantastic yuletide themed reads that I have enjoyed very much in the past. This latest release from Karen Swan, titled The Christmas Secret, is another fabulous addition to the Karen Swan collection and it is novel that demonstrates her strength in delivering a compelling Christmas based yarn.

The Christmas Secret is based around a fascinating main plot. It centres on a high powered young business woman, Alex Hyde, who has quite an interesting job. Alex is called in by companies to help rescue them from potential disaster. She is an executive coach, leading the way in ensuring companies make the best decisions possible to keep their business running to an optimal level. We soon learn through following the

character of Alex that this is not an easy job but Alex seems to relish being at the top of her game – her waiting list is expansive. It initially surprised me that Alex chose to skip her long waiting list and slot Kentallen Distilleries into her schedule so close to the Christmas period but she was obviously drawn to the company and its partners as much as I was!

There is a beautiful sub plot that plays out in The Christmas Secret. At the opening of some, not all of the chapters in the novel, we are provided with letters and recollections pertaining to a real life shipping disaster that occurred off the remote island of Islay in 1918. I loved these sections of the narrative and found myself looking forward to and even flicking ahead of the book to find out when the next 1918 section would be included. I appreciated that Karen Swan left the significance and resolution to this sub narrative until the close of the book. This was a great plot to encourage me to stay with the book until the bitter end!

Swan's setting choice of The Christmas Secret is very appealing. It really ensures this book is the ideal holiday read. Even living in Australia, I was able to visualise the cold, remote and mysterious island of Islay thanks to Swan's prose. Likewise, the local inhabitants and supporting characters in the book compliment the setting and all came across as authentic. I loved my chance to get a little slice of the Scottish locale of Islay, I could taste the shortbread and could easily imagine myself enjoying a wee dram of whisky!

There is no doubt that Karen Swan has embarked upon a significant amount of research to develop her main storyline for The Christmas Secret. With a distillery at the centre of the action in the novel, Swan's descriptions of the whisky business was enlightening. It is always an added bonus when an author is able to insert a level of fun education into their novels and The Christmas Secret's focus on whisky made for a colourful read.

Swan's character list is a fine aspect of this novel. Alex, the book's title protagonist, has some great qualities. She offers a mix between strong and vulnerable and she also has a great back story, which I enjoyed uncovering through the progression of the book. Alex is paired well against leading renegade and the complicated Lochlan. I really liked the interplay between these two opposites. The road they travelled together was an interesting one and the final conclusion was well worth the wait, that's for sure!

The Christmas Secret is a delectable novel that you will want to devour over the festive period. I suggest a dram a whisky as the perfect accompaniment to this novel. With a tension filled narrative, loveable characters, a unique Scottish setting and an extra war time storyline added for good measure makes The Christmas Secret a staple read this Christmas!

*I wish to thank Pan Macmillan for providing me with a free copy of this book for review purposes.

Cressida McLaughlin says

I love all Karen's books, but in my opinion this is her best yet. The heroine is wonderful, the setting, the secrets, the hero - everything about it is compelling, and I found it utterly unputdownable. There are so many twists, so many scenes full of humour, tension and chemistry.

It is indulgent, breathless, heart-pummelling romantic fiction at its VERY best. Do not start it unless you have a day ahead of you, and do not expect to finish it with your composure intact. I loved, loved, loved this book. Yessum.

Amber says

4.5 stars- I LOOOOOVED this book! I have to say that Lochlan was one of the meanest SOB's I've ever come across for a while there, lol. This story worked so well because of the relationship between him and Alex. She worked for his uncle so she had to put up with it, no matter what her personal feelings were toward him. Instead of just being a girl who liked the mean guy that so stories are about. This book wasn't a romance, but it did have a love story as part of a much bigger picture. I really think the author completely did her homework when it came to all the ins and outs of the process of making whiskey and all that goes into it. I don't even drink but I found the process quite fascinating. I loved that there were so many layers to this story, and the fact that perfect Alex (whom I did NOT care for in the beginning) became more human as cracks in her armor began to show through. The relationship building between so many of the characters gave this story so many layers. I loved it. The story was great, the ending was perfect. I LOVED it!

Alina says

Christmas is not Christmas without Karen Swan's books. And her new "The Christmas Secret" novel has become one of my favorite books by this wonderful writer.

Alex Hyde - a business coach is hired to "straighten out" CEO of Kentallen Distilleries, Lochlan Farquhar. Both characters are determined and focused on their goals. That would be a huge benefit if their goals were not different. And lies that Alex was told from the beginning about Lochie didn't help her built a successful partnership with him. An accidental fire at the distillery doesn't help Alex's progress either. However after Alex mistakenly hijacks Lochie's weekend with his close friends, she learns the reasons behind stubborn CEO's behavior. During this weekend dangerous sparks are flying between our two headstrong characters.

Time is running out, Christmas is around the corner and Alex must wrap up the deal she was hired to do. Sholto Farquhar drives Lochlan out of family business using evidence Alex has found in family archives. Lochlan is devastated by her betrayal. The deal is done, she is financially rewarded, however, she is not at peace, Alex is angry that she was tricked by Farquhar family. All she wants is to fix what she had broke, and when Alex Hyde sets the goal - she achieves it... well and gets her happy ending in the process.

It was an absolute delight to get lost in the pages of this marvelous novel. Karen Swan did it again!

Lori says

Who would have thunk it? Definitely not my usual style of read but I thoroughly enjoyed this book given to me as a gift this Christmas by a dear friend. Perhaps it was the amazing setting of rustic Islay, Scotland at Christmastime having visited that fabulous country not that long ago. Perhaps it was the plot revolving around a longtime family-owned distillery and the fascinating details of the scotch-making business, almost as old as Scotland itself or the compelling historical subplot about the sinking of an American warship off the island in the First World War. Maybe it was the character of Alex who I wholly disliked for a good chunk of the book but who learned to grow on me, along with the accompanying cast of supporting characters as the story progressed. Whatever it was, this book sneaks up on you as a thoroughly enjoyable read that one can't help but polish off in a couple of sittings. It's a great mix of history, mystery, intrigue and complex relationships. Well worth your time. Enjoy

Abby Welker says

Another Karen Swan book that I loved! (Lots of F-bombs in this one for those who follow my reviews) I loved the setting of the Scottish island and the intertwining stories. The characters were lovable and I loved Alex and Lochlan's chemistry, I loved how their love story unfolded, and I loved the kindhearted people that came into Alex's life. I think these books are a bit of an indulgence, but I love them because of it.

Kimberley says

Couldn't get in to this one, I'm afraid. Read 2/3 and was so fed up with the wine-making process that I quit. Plus, I really didn't like the lead character. Very shallow and unlikable. I've heard good things about this writer, but I found this offering boring. Sorry.

Gea says

I've been a big fan of Karen Swan's previous Christmas books, so was looking forward to this new one. I did enjoy the story for the most part, but was not a big fan of the whole section dealing with chakras. Somehow, I just can't imagine a top corporate consultant dealing with a client this way.

Jus says

I got this for Christmas and never got to reading. it I started it but found the start quite slow. However once I got going I could not put it down. The characters are really strong. Loved it and loved the theme and backdrop. Unusual. Great stuff!

Zoe says

Absorbing, enthralling, and positively addictive!

In this latest novel by Swan she sweeps us away to Isle of Islay where the people are the salt of the earth, the terrain is rugged, the peat is unique, and the whisky is smoky, smooth, and plentiful!

The prose is remarkably well turned and fluid. The characters are unique, flawed, eccentric, and lovable. And the story is an exceptionally compelling tale about life, loss, grief, war, familial dynamics, friendship, forgiveness, courage, community, happiness, love, and good Scotch.

Alternating between the past and the present, The Christmas Secret has it all. It's humorous and lighthearted, emotional and heartbreaking, mysterious and sweet. It grabs you from the very first page and with its wonderfully blended storyline of historical facts, snappy fiction, and delightful romance it's truly the perfect holiday treat!

Thank you to PGC Books for providing me with a copy of this story in exchange for an honest review.

All my reviews can be found on my blog at <https://whatsbetterthanbooks.com>

Kitvaria Sarene says

This one took a bit to hook me. Once I was in, it was a nice Christmas story set in a beautiful rural community. I really liked the characters, even though some of the twists between them didn't feel very natural to me. There was just too much bad drama too easily forgiven for me. While I do enjoy the kindness a Christmas story is supposed to show to get me into the Christmas spirit, it still should feel believable.

aside from that it was an interesting story I devoured in just one day (on audible) while baking Christmas cookies.

It has some real history woven in, and I felt it should have been a little bit less "fluffy" and a bit deeper, but was really just another easy chicklit. That didn't annoy me - I liked to read those especially for Christmas, but was expecting a bit more somehow...

Sarah Lafleur says

4.5/5

Agi says

I love Karen Swan's books, and I can't imagine Christmas without this author's new novel, and here it is - "The Christmas Secret", and it's another winner! It is actually really hard to put into words how much I adore Ms Swan's books, this one included, they are always so complex, full of secrets, twists and turns, filled with multi - faceted brilliant characters and you can always be sure that the author is going to deliver an utterly compelling story that is only getting better with every page turned.

There is not a single thing that I didn't like about this book, guys, so probably I should just finish my review right here, right now telling you that it was a brilliant read, go and buy it and you don't even have to thank me for the recommendation. But I wouldn't be myself if I did this, so be prepared for some gushing. Let's start with the characters. They were my favourite kind of characters. They felt like real people and I didn't always agree with their choices and decisions but it didn't mean that they were wrong. Sure, sometimes they were but it only made them more human in their eyes. Both our main characters, Alex Hyde and Lochlan Farquhar, had better and worse days, had tempers, made mistakes and I adored it in them - it seemed so realistic and also it didn't leave me indifferent about them and their futures. I wanted to slap them sometimes, to shake them or to pat them on their shoulder. I love how Karen Swan creates her characters, they are not immediately likeable, you must sometimes get used to some of them but it's great that they're not straightforward, that they have complex and complicated personalities. She gives us time to get to know Alex and Lochie, and when we think we know all about them, she starts then to introduce us to their past and it is like, oh wow, there is so much more to them than I thought! The motions of those two were so brilliantly captured, they were full of secrets and surprises and I loved following them on their journey. We of course

can't forget the background characters, which - no matter if they entered one or two or three scenes - were created with a lot of love to details, had their own personalities and added tons to the whole story.

Setting. Karen Swan is a queen of setting her novels in the most beautiful locations. I wouldn't say that they are the most unusual ones because she also takes us to Paris or Rome for example, but no matter where we find ourselves, and this time on small and remote island of Islay, west coast of Scotland, she brings all the settings to life and offers us the most gorgeous views and descriptions. The scenery of this Scottish island is breathtakingly beautiful, and I loved how realistic the descriptions were, how they highlighted how dependent the islanders were on the weather, how harsh could it be for them. But also the distillery was a part of the setting, and well, you could ask how much can you write about whisky, but believe me, you can, or Karen Swan can - it was incredibly interesting to find out about the steps of making whisky. The way the distillery was the heart of the community, how much depended on it was brilliantly brought to life.

Plot. Absolutely brilliant! I know that when I read Karen Swan's book I am for surprises, twists and turns that can change everything dramatically. I love how her books, and also "The Christmas Secret", are like puzzles, with the missing elements slowly, in the right pace, falling into places. This time one of the background subplots was a sinking of one of the liners transporting American troops to Europe during the First World War, that was torpedoed by the Germans, and so Alex's story intertwined with chapters full of retrospections. At first glance those stories has nothing in common, but slowly you start to see the whole picture, and you see in what way the stories are connected.

Writing style. Karen Swan knows her way with the words and her writing style is simply gorgeous, guys. She knows perfectly well how to write a complex, deep book. She touches upon so many issues in "The Christmas Secret" but no matter what it is she writes about it's not only brilliantly researched but it's also brought to us in the most beautiful, rich descriptions and you immediately feel like part of the story.

"The Christmas Secret" was a gorgeous story about life on a small island and its community, about love, friendship, forgiveness, family bonds and - let's not forget it - whisky. It was an impressive piece of fiction. It was filled with emotions and feelings, hot and cold, it was honest and genuine and it was also a great love story, both in the present and the past. I really loved every single page of this book, and I loved how Karen Swan made me think (as usual!) that I knew what's going to happen and then dropping a surprise or two on my not expecting it self - I love this, when the plot is unpredictable, you can't see through it, when there are moments that you don't expect, and this is this kind of plot - you know, the one with the "BAM" or "Yesss!" moments. This is another winner from this author and I highly recommend this book to you - Karen Swan at her best, and there really wouldn't be Christmas without a new Karen Swan!

Copy provided by the publisher in return for an honest review.

MarQuinta Moore says

Very predictable, I knew what was going to happen in chapter 3. My biggest issue is Alex. She was supposed to be so great at her job and extremely professional yet she didn't even have a job title for herself. She never seemed to let her clients talk, and always made assumptions and they were always wrong! Also she had a job but hardly seemed to do it, and didn't try to get to know the company, which we knew because the point of her being there was not to get to know the company but to remove the "problem". She also didn't try to solve the problem or to figure out if that was actually the problem with the company.

Lastly the flashbacks were not really needed. You could tell pretty early on what they were leading to, so

they just took away from the story, the writer could have just left the flashbacks at the beginning of the book and the one at the end.

The only thing that kept me reading was me waiting for Alex to eat crow and learn that she isn't actually good at her "job".
