



Desert King, Pregnant Mistress

By Susan Stephens

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Beth comes to the island a naïve virgin, but leaves an awakened woman—and unknowingly pregnant with the sheikh's baby! When the desert king vows to claim his child—and take its mother as his permanent mistress—Beth is powerless to refuse a royal decree!

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Desert King, Pregnant Mistress By Susan Stephens Bibliography

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Editorial Review

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She was hiding in a rock pool, watching a naked man stride out of the surf. Beth Tracey Torrance, good girl, quiet girl, shop girl, Liverpool girl, pressed up against warm rocks in a foreign land beneath a blazing sun. And not just any country, but the desert kingdom of Q'Adar, where men rode camels and carried guns! Her stay-at-home self would say she was mad to be sitting here, frozen to the spot like one of the mannequins in the store—her friends would put it somewhat stronger—but she was drawn to this man. Just call it essential research. Well, she had to give a full report of her trip when she got back home, didn't she?

Beth leaned forward cautiously to take another look. If she'd thought the lash of sea on rock was elemental, the man leaving the ocean was even more stunning. Under different circumstances she would have turned away, because he was nude, but nothing seemed real to her here in Q'Adar—not the fabulous riches, the glamour, or the beautiful people.

Where was the camera when you needed it? With his lean, muscular frame and regal bearing, she was sure this man must be a member of the proud Q'Adaran race. And it wasn't every day you got the chance to stare at a man so beautiful he took your breath away.

Her colleagues at the luxury department store, Khalifa, would never believe this! She had amazed them once already with the news that her prize for being voted Shop Assistant of the Year for the Khalifa luxury group included not just a trip to the desert kingdom of Q'Adar, but a fairy-tale gown to wear to the Platinum and Diamond Ball—being held to celebrate the thirtieth birthday of the country's ruler, as well as his coronation, or whatever it was called when a man was voted Sheikh of Sheikhs. And this was the same man whose extensive business-portfolio included the Khalifa brand.

She had never met her boss, Mr Khalifa Kadir, the legendary founder of the international chain of luxury stores, but was stunned to think he would now be known as His Majesty. His full title was His Majesty Khalifa Kadir al Hassan, Sheikh of Sheikhs, Bringer of Light to His People. It sounded like something out of a fairy story, Beth thought as the man walked up the beach and disappeared behind some rocks.

And now she, Beth Tracey Torrance, was going to meet the Sheikh of Sheikhs when he handed her the trophy she'd won. So, should she bow or should she curtsey? Beth wondered, distractedly chewing her lip. There wasn't much room for manoeuvre in her tight-fitting dress, so maybe she should just make a small bow when she met him... *When she met him!* When she, an ordinary girl, met the Sheikh of Sheikhs! It was all she had dreamed about for weeks now. And yet that dream had just been eclipsed by some man on a beach.

Pressed back against the rocks, Beth closed her eyes and inwardly melted. Forget the sheikh. This man would be branded on her mind for ever!

He felt rather than saw the intruder. His training in the special forces had served him well. The sixth sense he had developed during army service had saved his life on several occasions, and had also proved a handy tool when it came to developing his business instinct. His profits now rivalled those of oil, and Q'Adar was rich in oil. Most sheikhs didn't work, but where was the challenge in spending oil wealth when that precious resource seeped out of the ground? And where was the satisfaction in paying experts to earn money for him? Where was the sense of achievement in sitting back while others did the work for him? He was always restless, always seeking the next challenge, and now he had accepted the greatest challenge of his life: to rescue his country, Q'Adar, from the brink of disaster.

Throwing back his head to embrace the warmth of the molten sun, the Sheikh of Sheikhs, His Majesty Khalifa Kadir al Hassan, rejoiced that he was more than strong enough for the task as he luxuriated in the seductive heat of his native land.

He was gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous. And if he'd just turn a little to the right...

No.

No!

What was she thinking?

Beth's thoughts flew into a frenzy as the man's naked body was fully revealed. She exhaled with relief as he turned his back. She didn't want him to turn around again or she'd be damaged for life. She'd never find his equal. *Never!* He'd been close enough for her to see *everything!* And there was an awful lot of everything to see. He wasn't even covered by a towel, though she could see one neatly folded on a rock. Thankfully the rock was some way away, which meant he wouldn't have to pass her hiding place when he went to get it. Which meant she was safe to go on staring at him. Well, she had to remember every bit of this in detail to tell her friends, didn't she?

* * *

To an untrained observer he might appear oblivious to the dangers around him, but he never took anything for granted, especially his personal safety. He had made his life outside Q'Adar, and was still weighing up the risks here. He had returned to his homeland at the request of the other sheikhs, who had asked him to lead them, and he was ready to serve. His life experiences had prepared him for most things—with the possible exception of the unfathomable workings of a woman's mind. His portfolio of business interests had achieved global renown, and he had no personal issues to distract him; no taint of scandal touched him. As a stranger, to emotion he doubted it ever would. His sense of duty was all-embracing, and, having accepted this challenge, he wouldn't let his fellow sheikhs down by carelessly offering himself up for slaughter.

As he moved steadily along the beach Khal caught sight of a flash of glowing hair. It confirmed his earlier analysis of the situation—the risk was small. An agent would have made her move by now. Paparazzi? The direction of the sun would have flared off their camera lens. No, this was a sight-seeing expedition by an amateur.

Burying his face in the towel he'd left ready for when he quit the sea, he took his time, knowing this would lull the young woman into a false sense of security. He could wait all he liked; she couldn't get past him. He was between her and the palace, and with the ocean in front of her, and thousands of miles of unseen desert surrounding them, she wouldn't be going anywhere.

Plus she would be growing increasingly uncomfortable in the heat, while he felt refreshed—and not just in the body, but in the mind; the sea had cleansed him. He swam every day, either in the pool at one of his many homes, or in the ocean. It was one of his few indulgences. It allowed him to step outside himself—outside his life. Pitting his strength against the ocean gave him something else to think about other than balance sheets and treachery. He needed that space. Q'Adar had grown fat and lazy in his absence, and he intended to change that by setting up a strong infrastructure and wiping out corruption. It was a daunting task, and would take many years to achieve, but eventually he would reach that goal; he was determined to.

The fact that someone had managed to elude his security guards was an example of the general sloppiness he had uncovered, though for now good business-practice required him to hold back on reprisal until he had a

chance to assess all the players involved. For what was a country, other than a business to be managed efficiently for the good of its people? It was ironic to think his business acumen was one of the reasons his fellow sheikhs had voted him into this position of supreme power over them, but he didn't kid himself it had been a popularity poll—they knew his reputation. The financial press dubbed him ruthless and unforgiving, and where his employees were concerned that was correct. He didn't take the livelihoods of fifty-thousand people lightly. He defended them as sheikhs of old had defended their territories, and if that meant cutting out the dead wood, and neutralising the competition, then that was what he did.

But for now his interest lay in tracking down this young woman. He would use her as an example of how the security forces were deficient, and stealth was his weapon of choice. His angle of approach would make her think he was walking away from her, when in fact he would be coming closer with every step.

As he prowled closer he was forced to shut out the seductive beauty of his homeland. There was much in Q'Adar to tempt the senses, and it would be easy to slip into self-indulgent ways. A panorama of exquisite loveliness tempted him to lower his guard and linger. When he returned to the palace he would be greeted by sights of unimaginable splendour—every wall at the Palace of the Moon was decorated with gold leaf, and the doors were studded with precious stones. Beguiling perfumes would lure him into thinking of erotic pleasures, while music would thrum a constant siren-song through his senses.

The only sticking point for him at the palace was his mother. Hoping he would marry soon, she had assembled the world's most beautiful women for his perusal. Every royal house was represented—and there was no doubt her efforts had pleased the corrupt sheikhs, who didn't care about his choice of bedmate just so long as he was distracted and left them alone. What they had failed to realise was that his mistress was work, and that here in Q'Adar there was much to do.

Beth watched the man bury his face in the towel with a mixture of apprehension and fascination. There was something about his stillness that warned her to be wary. She couldn't shake off a feeling of uneasiness. Maybe he did know she was here, watching him. Maybe he wasn't just burying his face in a towel, but quietening his body in order to listen to his senses. As he lifted his head the onshore breeze caught his thick black hair and tossed it around his face. He was magnificent. She'd never seen anyone like him before, and she held her breath as he fixed the towel around his waist.

He started walking—thankfully, away from her. Cutting at right angles to the beach, he disappeared out of sight behind some more rocks...

Letting out her ...

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Clarence Riley:

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