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Duty & Desire: The Future King's Pregnant Mistress A Royal Bride at the Sheikh's Command (Royal House of Niroli)

By Penny Jordan



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A Royal Bride at the Sheikh's Command (Royal House of Niroli)** By Penny Jordan

The Royal House of Niroli—always passionate, always proud!

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A ROYAL BRIDE AT THE SHEIKH'S COMMAND

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Editorial Review

About the Author

After reading a serialized Mills & Boon book in a magazine, Penny Jordan quickly became an avid fan! Her goal, when writing romance fiction, is to provide readers with an enjoyment and involvement similar to that she experienced from her early reading – Penny believes in the importance of love, including the benefits and happiness it brings. She works from home, in her kitchen, surrounded by four dogs and two cats, and welcomes interruptions from her friends and family.

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Marco opened his eyes, and looked at the bedside clock: three o'clock in the morning. He'd been dreaming about Niroli—and his grandfather, the king. His heart was still drumming insistently inside his chest, its beat driven by the adrenalin surges of challenge and excitement that reliving one of his past youthful arguments with his grandfather had brought him.

It had been in the aftermath of one of those arguments that Marco had made his decision to prove to himself, and to his grandfather, that he was capable of achieving success somewhere other than Niroli and without his grandfather's influence and patronage. He had been twenty-two then. Now he was thirty-six, and he and his grandfather had long since made a peace—of a sort—even if the older man had never really understood his grandson's refusal to change his mind about his vow to make his own way in the world. Marco had been determined that his success would come *not* as the grandson of the King of Niroli but via his own hard work. As simple Marco Fierezza, a young European entrepreneur, he had used his shrewd grasp of finance to become one of the City of London's most lauded financiers, and a billionaire.

In the last few years it had caused Marco a certain amount of wry amusement to note how his grandfather had turned to him for financial advice with regard to his own private wealth, whilst claiming that their blood tie absolved him of paying for Marco's services! The truth was, his grandfather was a wily old fox who wasn't above using whatever means he could to coerce others into doing what he wanted, often claiming that what he did was done for the good of Niroli, rather than himself. Niroli!

Outside, the icy cold rain of London rattled against the windows of his Eaton Square apartment, and Marco felt a sudden sharp pang of longing for the beautiful Mediterranean island his family had ruled for so many generations: a sun-drenched jewel of green and gold in an aquamarine sea, from where dark volcanic mountains rose up wreathed in silvery clouds.

The same sea that had claimed the lives of his parents, he reminded himself sombrely, and which had not just robbed him of them, but also made him heir to the throne.

He had always known that ultimately he would become Niroli's king, but he had also believed that this event lay many years away in the future, something he could safely ignore in favour of enjoying his self-created, self-ruled present. However, the reality was that what he had thought of as his distant duty was now about to become his life.

Was that knowledge the reason for the dream he'd had? After all, when it came to the relationship he would have with his grandfather if he agreed to do as King Giorgio had requested and return to Niroli to become its ruler, wasn't there going to be an element of the prodigal male lion at the height of his powers returning to spar with the ageing pack leader? Marco knew and understood the older man very well. His grandfather

might claim that he was ready to hand over the royal reins, but Marco suspected that Giorgio would still want to control whoever was holding them as much as he could. And yet, despite his awareness of this, Marco knew that the challenge of ruling Niroli and making it the country he wanted to see it become—by sweeping away the outdated and over-authoritarian structures his grandfather had put in place during his long reign—was one that excited him.

There had never been any doubt in Marco's mind that when ultimately he came to the throne he would make changes to the government of the island that would bring it into the twenty-first century. But then he had also envisaged succeeding his gentle, mild-mannered father, rather than having his tyrannical grandfather standing at his shoulder.

Marco gave a small dismissive shrug. Unlike his late father, a scholarly, quiet man who, Marco had recognised early in his life, had been bullied unmercifully and held in contempt by the King, Marco had never allowed himself to be overwhelmed by his grandfather, even as a child. They shared a common streak of almost brutally arrogant self-belief, and it had been this that had led to the conflict between them. Now, as a mature and powerful man, there was no way Marco intended to allow *anyone* to question his right to do things his own way. That said, he knew that taking the throne would necessitate certain changes in his own lifestyle; there were certain royal rules he would have to obey, if only to pay lip-service to them.

One of those rules forbade the King of Niroli to marry a divorcee. Marco was in no hurry to wed, but when he did he knew he would be expected to make a suitable dynastic union with some pre-approved royal princess of unimpeachable virtue. Somehow he didn't think that it would go down well with his subjects, or the paparazzi, if he were to be seen openly enjoying the company of a mistress, instead of dutifully finding himself a suitable consort.

He looked towards the bed where Emily lay sleeping, oblivious to what lay ahead and the fast-approaching end of their relationship. Her long blonde hair—naturally blonde, as he had good reason to know—was spread against the pillow. To Marco's surprise, he was suddenly tempted to reach out and twine his fingers through its silken strands, knowing that his touch would wake her, and knowing too that his body was hardening with his immediate need for the intimacy of her body. That he should still desire her so fiercely and so constantly after the length of time they had been together—so very much longer than he'd spent with any woman before—astonished him. But the needs and sexual desires of Marco Fierezza could not be compared with the challenge of becoming the King of Niroli, he acknowledged with his customary arrogance. *King of Niroli.*

Emily knew nothing about his connection with Niroli, or his past, and consequently she knew nothing either about his future. Why should she? What reason would there have been for him to tell her, when he had deliberately chosen to live anonymously? He had left Niroli swearing to prove to his grandfather that he could stand on his own feet and make a success of his life without using his royal position, and had quickly discovered that his new anonymity had certain personal advantages; as second in line to Niroli's throne he had grown used to a certain type of predatory woman trying to lure him. His grandfather had warned him when he had been a teenager that he would have to be on his guard, and that he must accept he would never know whether the women who strived to share his bed wanted him for himself, or for who he was. Living in London as Marco Fierezza, rather than Prince Marco of Niroli though he was cynically aware that his combination of wealth and good looks drew the opposite sex to him, he did not attract the kind of feeding frenzy he would have done if he'd been using his royal title. Marco had no objection to rewarding his chosen lovers generously with expensive gifts and a luxurious lifestyle whilst he and they were together. He started to frown. It still irked him that Emily had always so steadfastly—and in his opinion foolishly—refused to accept the presents of jewellery he'd regularly tried to give her.

He'd told her dismissively to think of it as a bonus when she had demanded blankly, 'What's this for?' after he had given her a diamond bracelet to celebrate their first month together.

Her face had gone pale and she'd looked down at the leather box containing the bracelet—a unique piece he'd bought from one of the royal jewellers—her voice as stiff as her body. 'You don't need to bribe me, Marco. I'm with you because I want you, not because I want what you can buy me.'

Now Marco's frown deepened, his reaction to the memory of those words exactly as it had been when Emily had first uttered them. He could feel the same fierce, angry clenching of his muscles and surge of astounded disbelief that the woman who was enjoying the pleasure of his love-making and his wealth could dare to suggest that he might need to bribe her to share his bed!

He had soon put Emily in her place though, he reminded himself; his response to her had been a menacingly silky soft, 'No, you've misunderstood. After all, I already know exactly why you are in my bed and just how much you want me. The bribe, if you wish to think of it as that, is not to keep you there, but to ensure that you leave my bed speedily and silently when I've had enough of having you there.'

She hadn't said anything in reply, but he had seen in her expression what she was feeling. Although he'd never been able to get her to admit to it, he was reasonably sure that her subsequent very convenient business trip, which had taken her away from him for the best part of a week, had been something she had conjured up in an attempt to get back at him. And to make him hungry for her? No woman had the power to make herself so important to him that being with her mattered more than his own iron-clad determination never to allow his emotions to control him and so weaken him. He had grown up seeing how easily his strong-willed grandfather had used his own son's deep love for all those who were close to him to coerce, manipulate and, more often than not in Marco's eyes, humiliate him into doing what King Giorgio wanted. Marco had seen too much to have any illusions about the value of male pride, or the strength of will over gentleness and a desire to please others. Not that Marco hadn't loved his father; he had, so much so that as a young boy he had often furiously resented and verbally attacked his grandfather for the way the older man had treated his immediate heir.

That would never happen to him, Marco had decided then. He would allow no one, not even Niroli's king, to dictate to him.

Marco was well aware that, despite the fact that he had often angered his grandfather with his rebellious ways, the older man held a grudging respect for him. Their p...

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