



A Whisper of Disgrace (Sicily's Corretti Dynasty Book 5)

By Sharon Kendrick

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Impulsive and irresistible: Can a Corretti tame a sheikh?

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Rosa has been too good for too long and will not jump from one gilded cage to another—no matter how brightly it glitters!

But Kulal has centuries of the desert in his blood and the more Rosa resists, the hotter it fires in his veins. As their passion burns through the tethers around his heart, will this arrogant sheikh accept this Corretti?

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A Whisper of Disgrace (Sicily's Corretti Dynasty Book 5) By Sharon Kendrick Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #381514 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-09-01
- Released on: 2013-09-01
- Format: Kindle eBook



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Sharon Kendrick started story-telling at the age of eleven and has never stopped. She likes to write fast-paced, feel-good romances with heroes who are so sexy they'll make your toes curl! She lives in the beautiful city of Winchester – where she can see the cathedral from her window (when standing on tip-toe!). She has two children, Celia and Patrick and her passions include music, books, cooking and eating – and drifting into daydreams while working out new plots.

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The bottle was cold, but not nearly as cold as the ice around her heart. Rosa lifted the champagne to her lips and drank another mouthful as she tried to dull the pain. She wanted to wake up and find that the past few days hadn't happened. She wanted to be the person she thought she'd always been. And she wanted that towering man on the other side of the nightclub to stop watching her with that dark and unsettling stare of his.

The flashing lights and loud music were making her feel giddy—or maybe that was just the champagne she'd been glugging from the moment she'd walked in. She wasn't really used to the sharp, bubbly flavour and she didn't really like it—mainly because she'd been brought up on the wines of Sicily which were rich and warm and red. Or at least, she'd been allowed the occasional half-glassful, topped up with water—watched over by the fiercely protective eyes of her two brothers.

Except that they were not really her brothers, were they? From now on, she had to start thinking of them as her half-brothers.

Rosa gripped the neck of the bottle, a shudder running down her spine as she forced herself to confront the unbelievable truth. That nothing was as it seemed, nor ever would be again. The discovery had been brutal and she'd found out in the worst possible way that she'd been living a lie all her life.

And she was nothing but a fake.

"Mademoiselle? You are ready?"

Wordlessly, Rosa nodded as the nightclub attendant gestured towards the podium on which various women had been attempting to pole dance all evening. It would be fair to say that most of them had been making an absolute hash of it, despite the fact that they were slim and blonde and incredibly fit. But then, all the women on this part of the French Riviera looked like that. Rosa was the one who stood out like a sore thumb with her mahogany hair, olive skin and the generous curves—which were currently spilling out of her brand-new crimson dress.

She placed one leg rather unsteadily on the podium, wondering if she would be able to dance in the kind of heels she wouldn't have dared wear back home in her native Sicily. But who cared if she stumbled? And who cared if her dress was the shortest thing she'd ever worn? Not her. Tonight she was going to shrug off the old Rosa, who had cared so much about appearances and doing the right thing. Tonight she was going to embrace a brand-new Rosa—one who had grown a tougher skin so that nobody could hurt her ever again. On this privileged strip of French coastline known as the Cote d'Azur, she would emerge from her protective

shell into a glittering and unrecognisable creature—and her transformation would be complete.

She took another slug of champagne and put the bottle down, but as she stepped up onto the podium, she found her gaze locked with the man on the other side of the club—the one with the dark hair and the powerful body. He was still watching her—and something in the speculative amusement which glittered in the depths of his eyes made Rosa's stomach perform an odd kind of flip. Hadn't anyone ever taught him that it was rude to stare like that? And even more rude to ignore that poor woman who was practically draping herself over him.

The music began as Rosa gripped the pole, thrusting her pelvis towards it, the way she'd watched the others do. She'd never even seen a pole dance before tonight—nor would she ever have dared enter a competition for enthusiastic amateurs. But shock could make a person behave in a way which was completely out of character.

Snaking one leg around the slippery pole, she began to move. She could feel the smooth, cold metal sliding against her bare thigh. The alcohol was relaxing her and the hypnotic beat of the music began to suck her in. And suddenly it was easy. Easy to lose herself in the sensual sway of the music and forget about her own particular heartache. Her movements seemed instinctive—as if she had been born to dance this way. As if rubbing her body against a static piece of metal was the only way to go. Closing her eyes, she raised her leg even higher and tipped her head back, so that she could feel her long hair brushing against the floor. She began to grind her hips in slow and sensuous circles against the pole and, inexplicably, could feel the slow burning heat of excitement deep in her groin.

Through her dreamy reverie she could hear other sounds. A loud, whooping noise as she slid up and down in time to the music. The unrestrained clamour of male voices shouting enthusiastically as she clutched the pole and writhed against it. But Rosa didn't care who was shouting—she just kept her eyes tightly closed and gave the dance everything she'd got. It was the most cathartic thing she'd ever done and it wasn't until the music had stopped that she opened her eyes to find that a large crowd of men had gathered at the front of the stage to watch her.

For a moment she blinked at them, feeling like a prize exhibit being paraded in a foreign zoo. She found herself expecting to see the furious faces of her brothers.

Correction. Her half-brothers—but they were hundreds of miles away.

She straightened up and flicked her gaze over the assembled men, wondering how she was going to be able to make her way through them without pushing. Lots of them had their shirts open to the waist and their chests looked all sweaty. She didn't want to touch them. She shuddered. She didn't want anything to do with them. All she wanted was another drink, because the aching in her heart was starting to return and a drink seemed the only way to numb it. She bent to pick up the bottle, when she felt the whisper of fingertips on her arm and, straightening up, she found herself staring into the blackest pair of eyes she had ever seen.

It was the man from the opposite side of the club. The one who'd been staring at her. Who up until ten minutes ago had been the object of some beautiful woman's attention. She tried to focus her gaze to look at him properly, and as his image blurred and then sharpened again, she thought that she'd never seen a man like this before. Standing up close to his hard body and staring up into his hawk-nosed face, Rosa could suddenly understand why that woman had been draping herself all over him. He seemed larger than life—as if he was composed of some dark, elemental force which dominated the entire room. His black eyes glittered—as if a fire was smouldering behind those long lashes—and his lips were full and sensual.

But he frowned as he glanced at the clamouring throng of men. 'You look to me like someone in urgent need of rescuing,' he said, in an exotic accent she didn't recognise.

The old Rosa might have been intimidated by such a man—that's if she had ever been allowed to get within six feet of him by her overprotective family. But this new and tipsy Rosa was feeling no such thing as intimidation. Instead she looked into his eyes and felt an undeniable excitement—as if she had just found something she hadn't expected to find. Something she hadn't even realised she'd been looking for. 'And you're just the one to do it, I suppose?'

'I'm the perfect candidate for any kind of rescue mission, my beauty. Be assured of that.'

Trying to dampen down the excitement which was fizzing through her veins, she looked around her in mock surprise. 'But I can't see your white horse anywhere.'

'That's because I always ride a black stallion, although never in France. He's big and he's powerful and he's not particularly partial to nightclubs.' His eyes were gleaming as they gazed at her. 'Unlike a woman who doesn't seem to realise what havoc she was creating when she performed that incredibly sexy dance a few moments ago and nearly had the whole place in meltdown.'

Rosa's smile became a little glassy, aware that the level of flirtation was escalating by the second. And she was feeling more than a little daunted by it because this kind of thing was way outside her experience. Even during her university days in Palermo, the men she'd fancied had steered clear of her when they'd discovered who she was. Because what man in their right mind would get involved with a Corretti woman, a woman they wouldn't dare touch for fear that one of her brothers or cousins would come after them?

She'd never met anyone who hadn't been intimidated by the reputation of her powerful family and she wouldn't have been allowed anywhere near a man like this. A man who was sizzling out so much sex appeal that she wondered if her fingers might burn if she reached out and touched him.

She knew that the sensible thing to do would be to turn around and walk away. To go back to the hotel she'd booked into and sleep off the champagne. She would wake up in the morning—probably with a splitting headache—and decide what she was going to do with the rest of her life.

But Rosa wasn't feeling sensible. She was feeling...defiant. Because defiance was easier to deal with than heartbreak and loneliness, wasn't it? Defiance made you feel alive, instead of flat and empty and wondering just where your life was going. 'I don't want to be rescued,' she said, a touch petulantly as she took another swig of champagne. 'I want to dance.'

'Now that,' he said steadily as he removed the bottle from her hand and handed it to someone standing nearby, who accepted it without comment, 'can also be arranged.'

He took her hand and led her towards the dance floor and Rosa was aware of a sudden and heady sense of danger as he took her into his arms and the music began to throb out a sultry beat. He was so tall, she thought—taller than any other man she'd ever seen. And his body felt so strong. She licked her dry lips. A woman wouldn't stand a chance against a man like this. The thought thrilled her, rather than scared her as she knew it should have done. 'I don't even know your name,' she shouted.

'That's because I haven't told you.'

'And are you going to tell me?'

'I might—if you're very good.'

Recklessly, she said, 'And if I'm not?'

He didn't miss a beat. 'In that case, I will definitely tell you—because there is nothing I like better than a woman who isn't good. My name is Kulal.'

She tried saying it. Rounding her lips she sounded out the first syllable and then, letting her tongue touch the upper palate, she murmured the second. 'Ku-lal.'

'Mmm. I like the way you say it. It sounds very sexy on your lips.'

Rosa giggled. 'Stop it!'

With a sudden hard beat of lust, Kulal pulled her closer and felt her melt against him, as if she'd been waiting all night to have him do that. And wasn't it like that for him? Hadn't his senses been ignited from the moment he'd set eyes on her and seen those soft lips parting with a look of innocent wonder, which certainly didn't match the sinful splendour of her voluptuous body? He could feel the way her breasts were pushing against his chest and he sucked in a breath of longing as he dipped his mouth to her ear. 'Now let's see if you can dance as well on the floor as you did on the podium, shall we, my beauty?'

The slick words which flowed from his lips were warning Rosa to be careful. Because there was a reason for the expression 'paying' someone a compliment—her ruthless family had taught her that. You told a woman she was pretty and she would put out for you—wasn't that how it worked? Hadn't she grown up watching the male members of her family as they'd put their own heartless seduction campaigns into action? Men like this wanted only one thing from a woman like her and she'd been brought up to guard her honour and integrity. But that was before the world had changed. Before the values she'd held so dear had been held up as shallow and worthless.

So she pushed away her doubts and instead glanced up at him, batting him a coquettish look she hadn't even realised had been in her repertoire until now. 'You're going to mark me out of ten, are you?'

'If you want.' His hands tightened around her waist.

'But I warn you in advance that I can be a very harsh judge.'

The words came out almost before she realised she'd said them. 'I'll take the risk,' she said.

'Good.' His lips nuzzled against her neck. 'I like a woman who takes risks.'

Rosa could feel the whisper of his mouth on her bare neck and she closed her eyes with pleasure. This was...bliss. His arms had tightened around her and she realised that dancing with him was different to dancing with anyone else. He seemed to be making up the rules as he went along, completely ignoring the rhythm of the music and moving them around as if this was a slow waltz instead of a vaguely jumpy beat. And she was letting him. Why wouldn't she let him? Why, he could carry on doing that all night, he was so good at it.

'Do you like that?' he queried softly as the palms of his hands skated possessively over the curve of her bottom.

Her sudden, heady sense of freedom and the sensation of listening to her body's desires made Rosa bold and she didn't shrink away from the way he was pulling her even closer. 'Yes.'

'I thought so. I like it too. I like it very much.'

Kulal closed his eyes as he felt her fingertips move to his shoulders. He could feel the brush of her silken hair against his cheek and the wave of desire which swept over him was so strong that he was filled with an unbearable need to touch her more intimately.

But even though he'd always been known as a mould-breaking prince, Kulal respected his position enough not to throw his royal role into jeopardy. Dancing with a woman who was clearly an exhibitionist was one thing, but making love to her in a public place was quite another. So that even though they were shielded by the bobbing crowds around them and even though the flashing lights obscured most of their movements, he did not do what he wanted to do. Which was to play with the tips of her breasts through the thin satin of her mini-dress. Or to slide his hand up her thigh and touch the undoubtedly moist heat which would be searing its way through her panties.

That's if she was wearing any.

He swallowed, wondering if she could feel the sudden jerk of his erection.

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