



Duty and the Beast

By Trish Morey

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She hasn't saved herself for all these years only to be taken by a barbarian! Rescued from the clutches of a lascivious prince, Princess Aisha Peshwah quickly realises she's jumped out of the frying pan and headfirst into the fire. Her rescuer is Zoltan Al Farouk bin Shamal - an unashamed barbarian! - who must marry Aisha himself to ensure he is crowned King! Commanding, stern and brutally attractive, Zoltan is as untamed as the desert he will be master of! And, as much as Aisha tries to resist, her innocent body soon begins to unravel beneath his powerful possession...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Trish Morey lives with her husband and four daughters in a special part of South Australia, surrounded by orchards and bushland, and visited by the occasional koala and kangaroo. With a lifelong love of reading, she penned her first book at the age of eleven, after which life, career and a growing family kept her busy until once again she could indulge her desire to create characters and stories – this time in romance. Visit Trish at her website: www.trishmorey.com.

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They came for her in the dead of night, while the camp was silent but for the rustle of palm leaves on the cool night air and the snort of camels dreaming of desert caravans long since travelled. She was not afraid when she heard the zip of the blade through the wall of the tent. She was not even afraid when a man dressed all in black, his face covered by a mask tied behind his head and with only slits for his eyes, stepped inside, even though his height and the width of his shoulders were enough to steal her breath away and cause her pulse to trip.

Instead it was relief that flooded her veins and brought her close to tears, relief that the rescue she had prayed and hoped so desperately for had finally arrived.

'I knew you would come for me,' she whispered as she slid fully dressed out of bed to meet him, almost tripping over her slippers in her rush to get away. She swallowed back a sob, knowing what she was escaping, knowing how close she had come. But at last she would be safe. There was no need to be afraid.

But when the hand clamped hard over her mouth to silence her, and she felt herself pulled roughly against his hard, muscular body, there was no denying her sudden jag of fear.

'Do not utter another word, Princess,' the man hissed into her ear as he dipped his head to hers. 'Or it may be your last.'

She stiffened even as she accepted the indignity, for she had been raised to accept no stranger's touch. But she had little choice now, with his arm like a steel band around her waist, the fingers of one large hand splayed from her chest to her belly and the palm of his other hand plastered hard across her mouth so that she could all but taste his heated flesh.

Unnecessarily close.

Unnecessarily possessive.

Every breath she took contained his scent, a blend of horseflesh and leather, of shifting sands and desert air, all laced with a warm, musky scent that wormed its way into all the places he touched her and beyond. Those places burned with heat until unnecessarily possessive became unnecessarily intimate, and some innate sense of survival pounded out a message in her heartbeat, warning her that perhaps she was not as safe as she had supposed.

Something inside her rebelled. Foolish man! He might be here to rescue her but hadn't she been ready and waiting? Did he imagine she had prayed for rescue only to scream or run and risk her chances of escape?

She was sick of being manhandled and treated like a prize, first by Mustafa's goons and now by her own father's. She was a princess of Jemeya, after all. How dared this man handle her like some common sack of melons he might have picked up at the market?

He shifted and she squirmed, hoping to take advantage of his sudden stillness while his focus seemed elsewhere, but there was no escape. The iron band simply pulled her tighter against the hard wall of his body, his fingers tightening on her flesh, punching the air from her lungs. She gasped, her lips parting, and felt one long finger intrude between her lips.

Shock turned to panic as she tasted his flesh in her mouth.

She felt invaded. She felt violated with the intimacy of the act.

So she did the only possible thing she could. She bit down. *Hard.*

He jumped and spat out a curse under his breath, but, while he shifted his fingers away from the danger of her teeth, he did not let her go. 'Be still!' he hissed, holding her tighter, even closer to his rigid form, so that she was convinced he must be made of rock. Warm, solid rock but with a drum beating at its core. Once more she was reminded that this man was not just some nameless rescuer, not just a warrior sent by her father, but a man of flesh and blood, a beating heart and a hot hand that touched her in places no man's hand had a right to be. A hand that stirred a strange pooling heat deep in her belly...

She was glad she had bitten him. She hoped it hurt like hell. She would gladly tell him that too, if only he would take his damned hand off her mouth.

And then she heard it—a short grunt from outside the tent—and she froze as the curtains twitched open.

Ahmed, she realised as the unconscious guard was flopped to the carpet by a second bandit clad similarly in black. Ahmed, who had leered hungrily at her every time he had brought in her meals, laughing at her when she had insisted on being returned to her father, telling her with unrestrained glee exactly what Mustafa planned on doing with his intended bride the moment they were married.

The bandit's eyes barely lingered on her before he nodded to the man at her back. 'Clear for now, but go quickly. There are more.'

'And Kadar?'

'Preparing one of his "surprises".'

All at once she was moving, propelled by her nameless rescuer towards the slash in the tent wall, her slippered feet barely grazing the carpeted floor. He hesitated there just a fraction, testing the air, listening intently, before he set her down, finally loosening his grip but not nearly enough to excise the blistering memory of his large hand spreading wide over her belly.

'Can you run as hard as you bite?' he asked quietly, his voice husky and low as he wrapped his large hand around hers, scanning the area one last time before he looked down at her.

The glinting light in his eyes made her angrier than ever. Now he was laughing at her? She threw him an icy look designed to extinguish any trace of amusement. 'I bite harder.'

Even in the dark she thought she sensed the scarf over his mouth twitch before a cry rang out across the camp behind them.

'Let's hope you're wrong,' he muttered darkly, tugging her roughly into a run beside him, his hand squeezing hers with a grip of steel, the second man guarding their rear as together they scaled the low dune, shouts of panic and accusation now building behind them.

Adrenaline fuelled her lungs and legs—adrenaline and the tantalising thought that as soon as they were safe she was going to set her father's arrogant mercenary right about how to treat a princess.

From the camp behind came an order to stop, followed by the crack of rifle fire and a whistle as the bullet zinged somewhere over their heads, and she soon forgot about being angry with her rescuer. They would not shoot her, she reasoned. They would not dare harm a princess of Jemeya and risk sparking an international incident. But it was dark and her captors were panicking and she had no intention of testing her theory.

Neither had she any intention of complying with the command to stop, even if the man by her side had any hint of letting her go. No way would she let herself be recaptured, not when Mustafa's ugly threats still made her shudder with revulsion. Marry a slug like Mustafa? No way. This was the twenty-first century. She wasn't going to be forced into marrying anybody.

So she clung harder to her rescuer's hand and forced her feet to move faster across the sand, her satin slippers cracking through the dune's fragile crust until, heavy and dragging with sand, her foot slipped from one and she hesitated momentarily when he jerked her forwards.

'Leave it,' he snapped, urging her on as another order to stop and another shot rang out, and she let the other slipper be taken by the dune too, finding it easier to keep up with him barefoot as they forged across the sand. Her lungs and muscles burned by the time they had scaled the dune and plunged over the other side, her mouth as dry as the ground beneath her bare feet. As much as she wanted to flee, as much as she had to keep going or Mustafa's men would surely hunt her down, she knew she could not keep going like this for long.

Over the sound of her own ragged breath she heard it—a whistle piercing the sky, and then another, until the night sky became a screaming promise that ended with a series of explosions bursting colour and light into the dark night. The cries from behind them became more frantic and panicked and all around was the acrid smell of gunpowder.

'What did you do to them?' she demanded, feeling suddenly sickened as the air above the camp glowed now with the flicker of flame from burning tents. Escape was one thing, but leaving a trail of bloodied and injured—maybe even worse—was another.

He shrugged as if it didn't matter, and she wanted to pull her hand free and strike him for being so callous.

'You did want to be rescued, Princess?' Then he turned, and in the glow from the fires she could make out the dark shape of someone waiting for them, could hear the low nicker of the horses he held. Four horses, one for each of them, she noted, momentarily regretting the loss of her shoes until she realised all she would be gaining. She didn't care if her feet froze in the chill night air or rubbed raw on the stirrups. It was a small price to pay for some welcome space from this man. How she could do with some space from him.

'Surely,' she said, as they strode towards the waiting horses, 'you didn't have to go that far?'

'You don't think you're worth it?' Once again she got the distinct impression he was laughing at her. She looked away in sheer frustration, trying to focus on the positives. Her father had sent rescuers. Soon she would see him again. And soon she would be in her own home, where people took her seriously, and where men didn't come with glinting eyes, hidden smiles and hands that set off electric shocks under her skin.

She could hardly wait.

She was already reaching for the reins of the closest horse when his hand stopped her wrist. 'No, Princess.'
'No? Then which one's mine?'

'You ride with me.' 'But there are four.' 'And there are five of us.'

'But...' And then she saw them, two more men in black running low across the dunes towards them when she had been expecting only one.

'Kadar,' he said, slapping one of the men on the back as they neared, making her wonder how he could tell which one was...

Users Review

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