

The Samara Royal Family Series

# Introduction Stories

By Elizabeth Lennox

The following short stories give you a glimpse into the five siblings that will be featured in my next series. For more information on the books in the series, see the Samara Royal Family Series page on [ElizabethLennox.com](http://ElizabethLennox.com). The first three books in the series are available now for pre-order; an excerpt of book one, *Pregnant with the Sheik's Baby*, follows these introduction stories.

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## *Chapter 1*

“Jiran, you need to come down here,” Ava said through the phone lines, warily keeping an eye on her three sons as she spoke. Her husband, Sheik of Kilar, was going to have to deal with this mess. She considered herself to be strong and independent, but when her three sons got into this kind of mischief, Jiran had to take over. She couldn’t...it wasn’t...nope. Jiran had to be here for this.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. “I have a meeting in a moment.”

Ava shook her head. “No. You don’t. Come here now. I’m in my office and...” she stopped, not sure how to explain what she was looking at. “Well, just come here. Fast.”

Ava put the phone down and continued to stare. Three boys in seven years and they’d been the most wonderful, amazing and shocking years of her life. Before she’d met Jiran, she’d honestly never thought that this kind of happiness could ever exist, but hers was proof that life could be one amazing adventure after another.

Staring at her sons, all of whom were looking at her with...well, she couldn’t very easily tell what their eyes were telling her. It was the color. It was such a contrast.

“What’s wrong, honey?” Jiran asked when he stepped into her office a few moments after their phone conversation.

Ava looked up at her husband, amazed once again that this strong, powerful man could love her. He’d given her a love so strong, so amazing, she was stunned some nights.

This particular moment, she could definitely characterize as stunned, even horrified, surprise as well, although for a completely different reason.

Jiran stood behind their three sons, hands on hips and trying hard to be patient. “Well? What’s going on, honey?”

Ava looked down at her boys. Ramzi was seven years old this month, Turk was six and their little guy, Rais (who wasn’t little by any standard) was five. All three of them were crazy smart and ready to take on their future roles with enthusiasm. Which only made this moment more precious in her mind.

She lifted her hand and silently commanded her children to turn around and face their father. Reluctantly, they did so, but she could tell that their eyes were lowered in embarrassment. It was one thing for their mother to see them...like this. It was a different matter for their father to witness their childish antics.

Jiran glanced as his watch then down at his children...then did a double take.

He couldn’t take his eyes off of his three sons. “Honey...why are my children....” He stopped, not exactly sure what to say. He looked at his boys, then at his wife, then back down at his children, still...stunned. “Why do they look like Smurfs?”

Ava covered her mouth with her hand, trying very hard not to laugh. This really wasn’t funny. She had no idea what her sons had done this time to make their skin this color, but all three of them were blue. Not just a tinge of blue, either. Nope, they were a deep, startling, electric blue. Even their fingers were blue! There was a blue tinge to their dark hair and their

lashes. They were each wearing long sleeved shirts, but she suspected that their chests and stomachs were blue as well.

At the mention of the cartoon characters, she nearly lost it. She struggled to smother her laughter, to regain her composure sufficiently to respond to her husband's question.

It wasn't working, but she cleared her throat and managed a short reply. "Um...that's a good question. Ramzi, care to explain?"

The oldest and future Sheik of Kilar, Ramzi, shifted slightly as if he suspected he should be embarrassed, but then that innate pride kicked in and he lifted his chin and pulled himself up as tall as he could. "I read a story about a way to change one's skin color," he started to explain. His eyes glanced up nervously when his father's arms crossed over his chest. "Well, and I wanted to try it."

Jiran nodded, then looked to his next son. "And you, Turk?"

Turk shrugged his shoulders. "I wanted to be like Ramzi," he said with a confident voice.

Jiran looked towards his youngest. "Rais? You had to join in the party?"

Rais might be the youngest, but he had a solid dose of that inherent arrogance about him. "I like it," he claimed as only a five year old could. He even added a grin at the end, not fully realizing the trouble he was in at the moment. His white teeth were even brighter against the blue background of his face and lips and Ava wanted to burst out laughing.

Ramzi shook his head. "Rais went a bit overboard with the dye, Father. Turk and I had stepped out of the bathroom and found him washing himself with the colored water."

Jiran looked down at his youngest and nodded. "I think you won the competition." He looked back at his oldest. "How did you do it?"

Ramzi pulled his shoulders back. "We stole the chef's food dye, put it in a bowl and..." he shrugged. "It was pretty easy."

Jiran nodded his head. He couldn't look at Ava because he knew that he would start laughing. He knew she wanted him to take this seriously but...

Hell, his children were blue!

His boys really were too young to have figured out how to do something like this, but he wasn't willing to take their books away in order to stop their curiosity. A punishment would be appropriate at this moment, but...what in the world did a parent do to punish their children for turning themselves blue? This was definitely one of those moments when...well, when he'd like a manual!

Seriously? Blue?

"I see," he finally said. "Well, shouldn't you be in class right now?"

The boys all sighed with relief.

Ava wasn't as relieved. "Is that all you're going to say?" she demanded. She'd been an only child growing up so dealing with boys was a mystery. But she wasn't going to let this kind of incident go unpunished.

Jiran almost laughed when he saw the amusement in her brown eyes. She was just as stumped as he was and he knew exactly what she was doing. She didn't have any idea how to deal with her intelligent, curious children so she was dumping this on his shoulders.

"What do you think should happen?" he asked her smoothly.

Ava looked down at her three boys, still not sure what to do. And then brilliance hit her. "Isn't it time for another formal picture?" she offered out.

Jiran looked at her with admiration. He knew exactly what she was doing and, if they'd been alone, he would have pulled her into his arms and kissed her silly. "I believe it is time." He looked down at his sons. Ramzi was looking horrified, Turk was a bit confused, expecting a worse punishment and Rais was grinning from ear to ear, excited about having his picture taken while he was blue.

Ava nodded her head. "I'll have the photographer here this afternoon."

"Excellent," he said and kissed his wife. He then looked down at his three sons with a stern expression in his eyes. "Off to school. I'm sure your teachers are waiting for you."

The three boys walked out, only Rais excited for the day.

When they were alone again, Jiran turned to face Ava and was surprised when she angrily poked a finger in the middle of his chest. "I want a girl!" she told him with finality.

Jiran laughed and shook his head. "I thought you were finished having children," he pointed out. "In fact, when Rais was born, you specifically told me that you weren't giving me any more boys."

"I'm not," Ava asserted firmly, crossing her arms over her chest and glaring up at him. "I want a girl. And we're going to keep trying until you give me a girl," she told him.

Jiran's eyes flared with that lust that was never far from the surface when his wife was around. "Is that so?" he asked and pushed her back against her desk.

Ava instantly knew what he was about to do and pushed at his shoulders. "Not here, Jiran! You're not doing this to my desk again!" But it was too late. His hands were around her waist and her mind was already mush, anticipation surging through her as she thought about how wonderful it was to create a baby with this man.

He laughed, a sexy sound that never failed to make her body react. "Why not here?"

She slipped out from his arms and put several feet between them. "Because you made love to me on the desk in my other office years ago. Remember?"

"I can't forget," he told her as he continued to stalk her, not letting her get too far. "And it wasn't just once."

"Okay!" she held her hands out in front of her. "Fine! But all those times on my desk, they distracted me afterwards! I had to keep trading out desks!"

"It didn't work," he replied, moving towards her once again.

She laughed at his lustful expression, her heart speeding up as the memories hit her, too strong to ignore. "Because you kept making love to me on my new desk."

"Yes. Are you saying you didn't like those activities?"

She opened her mouth to tell him no, but she'd never been able to lie to him. "That's not the point!" And she once again slipped to the side, avoiding his hands. "Jiran, you have a meeting. You told me that yourself."

"It can wait. My wife has given me an order. I'm always happy to follow my wife's instructions."

Ava laughed and decided that she'd better run. Unfortunately, or maybe it was a good thing, but she never even made it to the door of her office. Within moments, she was on her new desk and Jiran was helping her to get that little girl.



## *Chapter 2*

“What is it?” Rais asked as he peered through the wooden slats of the crib.

At almost nine years old, Ramzi was the wisest of them all but his nose twitched with disgust as he surveyed the tiny, chubby thing sleeping in the crib. “It’s a girl,” he said with revulsion.

Turk stared at it as well, not sure what to make of this latest addition to their family. “What do we do with a girl?” he asked.

Ramzi shook his head. “Nothing. Girls are boring.”

Rais reached in and poked the sleeping infant. “Does it move?” he asked.

Ava walked over to the crib and put a hand on Ramzi and Rais’ heads. “Girls are a lot of fun,” she told her boys as she stared at her first daughter, already in love with her child. “And Ciala will be a lot of fun once she gets older. She’s just a baby now, but she’ll grow up and I think you’re going to like her just as much.”

The three boys looked at each other, silently conveying their skepticism. “She’s very nice,” Ramzi finally announced although his tone suggested that he was only being polite for his mother’s sake.

Ava laughed softly before she bent down to her sons’ eye level. “You’ll have a big responsibility ahead of you. Ciala will need your help to guide her through all of the stuff you three already know.”

Rais took another peek at the baby and shook his head. “She doesn’t look like she’ll be able to learn much.” At six years of age, he was already taking after his mother where math was concerned. He loved numbers and formulas, latching onto any math book he could find. “I’ll teach her, but...” he looked doubtful.

Ava laughed and tousled his hair. “Just you wait. She’s going to be lots of fun.”

Ramzi kept his face a perfect blank, just like his father would when he disagreed with someone. Turk wasn’t as successful at hiding his emotions so his cynicism came through loud and clear.

“Give her a few years. I think you’ll change your mind. Most boys change their minds about girls at some point.”

Ramzi, Turk and Rais looked at each other and grimaced. “Girls,” Ramzi said with a disgusted shake of his head.

### *Chapter 3*

Fourteen year old Ramzi walked into the school room. “Ciala, Shantra, we need to talk,” he said and sat down next on the floor where five year old Ciala was building a tower with blocks and three year old Shantra was drawing with fat crayons.

Ciala dropped her blocks and came over to sit on her oldest brother’s lap. She leaned her back against his chest and smiled up at him.

“You can’t date boys,” he told both of them.

Shantra looked at her brother with confusion, but she didn’t say a word.

“I don’t like boys,” Ciala assured him with five year old confidence.

“I’m a boy,” he said carefully, his mind going back to the previous night when he’d kissed a girl for the first time. As much as he had liked the experience, he didn’t want his sisters to have boys touch them. Ever!

“You’re my brother,” Ciala laughed. “You’re not a boy. I mean, you’re a boy, but not really.”

Ramzi rolled his eyes at her five year old logic. “The thing is, when you start to like boys, we’re going to have to talk. Because…” how did he explain? This was such a difficult conversation. “Well, you’re just not doing it.”

Ciala grinned. “Okay. No boys. But will you help me build a tower?”

Ramzi knew he was supposed to be in school. Chemistry was fascinating, but Ciala really was cute. And she was smarter than most of the girls he’d come into contact with so far, so she was more interesting to talk with even though she was only five years old. The jury was still out on Shantra. She was silent now, but boy could his little sister talk! She loved to chatter about anything under the sun. If she wasn’t talking, she was singing. Or dancing. Or just moving in general. Shantra could not sit still for even two minutes. He knew because he’d timed her. So far, she’d only made it to forty-five seconds.

He looked over at her now and, sure enough, Shantra was humming a little tune although he had no idea what it might be. Unfortunately, his baby sister could sing about as well as his mother. Pretty badly, in other words. At least his baby sister had a softer voice. When his mother bellowed out a song, she could clear out rooms.

“When you get older, I’m going to teach you self-defense, Ciala.”

She turned in his lap and smiled up at him. “Really? Will I be able to flip you over my head like you, Rais and Turk do to each other?”

Ramzi laughed at the possibility. “No. You won’t ever be able to flip me over, but you’ll be able to do that to any man who touches you.”

They were now on the floor and Ciala tried to imitate the way he was building his side of their tower, but Ramzi had studied architecture already and he was able to balance his blocks more accurately. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t get it right and her side of the tower kept tumbling down.

Ciala sighed with frustration at not being able to keep up with her brother.

Rais and Turk walked into the room at that point, saw what Ramzi was doing and sat down on the floor, each of them building an annex to the tower with elaborate cantilevers, bridges and connecting rooftops.

“You’re taking over again!” Ciala announced, stomping her foot for emphasis.

Rais looked up at her and shook his head. “Ciala, you look very pretty today.”

Ciala stuck her tongue out. “You’re still taking over. You do that all the time! You take over my toys!”

With that, she stomped over to where Shantra was drawing and picked up her own paper, glaring at her brothers occasionally, frustrated that they didn’t even care about her anger.

After several minutes of this, Ciala had had enough. “I think we should play hide and seek,” she announced.

The boys barely even acknowledged her. They were too intent on discussing the next section of their wooden tower, taking up all the available blocks. She considered just kicking their tower down with her foot but she remembered the last time she’d done something like that to her brothers. She’d been held upside down by her ankles and carried through the palace until her mother had rescued her. She’d just been relieved that she’d worn pants that day.

So instead of kicking things in, she took another tactic. She walked over to Turk who was bent over, focused on his portion of the wooden building. With a dramatic sigh, she draped herself across his back.

“Ciala! Get off me!” he snapped. But she was sticking to him like glue.

“Play hide and seek with me,” she pleaded.

“No, now get off,” and he shrugged one shoulder, hoping that would tumble her off of his back.

Ciala jumped to the floor but simply so that she could continue her mischief, inching closer to their “masterpiece”. “What does this do?” she asked and put her finger dangerously close to what she knew to be a supporting beam.

Rais glared at her. “Don’t touch it, Ciala.”

She almost giggled at how they all froze, worried that she’d touch that one block and make the whole thing come tumbling down.

“Well, what does this one do?” she asked and pointed to another vulnerable block.

Ramzi wasn’t going to risk it. He stood up and grabbed her legs, dragging her further away from the tower. “Be good!” he warned and moved back to his position.

Undeterred, Ciala shifted her attention to Rais, moving behind his back. She put her knees on his bottom and climbed up his back, propping her chin on his shoulder. “It looks good. But I know what would be even more fun,” she said with excitement.

The brothers all looked at Ciala, then at each other. Ciala was too young to decipher the silent message that passed among them. “Fine!” Turk announced. “We’ll play hide and seek. In fact, I’ll be ‘it’ first. I’ll count to ten and everyone go hide, okay?”

Ciala jumped off of Rais’ back and clapped her hands. “Wahoo! But you have to count to one hundred,” she cautioned.

Shantra stood up as well, clapping her hands even though she wasn't completely sure what all the excitement was about.

Ciala walked over to her baby sister and took Shantra's hand. "Start counting," she commanded. She waited until Turk was laying on the floor with his hands over his eyes. By the time he'd reached four, Ciala had pulled Shantra over to one of the closets.

She giggled as she pulled the door shut, turning on the light so that she and Shantra wouldn't become scared. She vaguely heard her brother counting, but the solid door muffled most of the noise.

Turk and Ramzi sat right back down around the wooden tower and continued their building efforts while the counting continued. Rais went to the other closet to get the rest of the wooden blocks so they could make their building bigger.

"Ready or not, here I come!" Turk called out. The three of them quietly discussed their building efforts, completely forgetting about their annoying little sisters who were sitting in the closet hiding from them.

Ciala had no idea how long she and Shantra sat in the closet, trying very hard to be quiet. But after a while, she accepted that she'd hidden too well for her brothers. It was only fair to come out and start the game over again.

Opening the door carefully, she peered out into the room and...the rats! All three of her brothers were sitting right back around that stupid tower. They hadn't even tried to find her!

Shantra's tiny hand moved into Ciala's and an idea came to mind. "Come on, Shantra. We have some teaching to do," she said.

Shantra skipped along next to her older and wiser sister, not sure what was going on but pleased to be included in the fun.

Ciala took one of the small shovels from the gardener's shed, handing one to Shantra and taking another for herself. She wasn't exactly sure what she was going to do, but it had to be good, she thought.

When she found something at the stables, she finally had a plan. In the garbage can, Ciala found several mesh bags that had previously contained grain and carried them through the stables. The stable workers all bowed to the little princesses and she smiled to each of them, cheerfully greeting each of them by name as she eagerly anticipated getting even with her horrible brothers. But when she found what she was looking for, her smile changed from polite to excited. "Come on, Shantra. This is perfect." She bent down and scooped up the horse manure into the mesh bags. Just a little in each one, she thought. Shantra was too busy banging her shovel against the dirt but once Ciala was finished, she brought the shovels back to the gardener's area and led Shantra back to the palace. Hiding the bags from the other staff members, she hurried to each of her brothers' rooms, placing the manure in strategic places, then slipping out.

Several hours later, Ciala was dressed in one of her prettiest dresses. She walked over to her mother and wrapped her arms around her neck. "You look pretty tonight," she said and plopped herself down on her mother's lap.

“Hello beautiful!” Jiran said as he stepped into the room. He kissed his wife first, then bent lower and tickled Ciala. “What have you been up to today?” he asked as he moved over to the bar and poured himself a drink.

“I played with Shantra,” she told her parents.

“Ciala!” a roar came from outside the living room door. A moment later, Ramzi’s tall body burst into the room. His eyes skittered through the room, landing finally on his little sister. “You are in trouble, little girl!” he yelled.

Jiran knew that something was up and stepped in front of his oldest son. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

Rais and Turk stepped in a moment later, both with equally furious expressions on their faces. Rais and Turk were almost the same height but Ramzi had experienced a growth spurt so he was a few inches taller. Unfortunately, all of that angry, young-teen fury was focused on Ciala at the moment.

“She did it, Father!” he roared, pointing an accusing finger at Ciala. “Now she’s trying to pretend to be all cute and innocent, but she did it!”

Jiran looked over at his daughter and knew from her expression that she’d been up to mischief. Ciala was cute, but she was still too young to hide her expressions. “Ciala? What did you do?” he demanded.

Rais and Turk pushed forward, only stopped by their father’s stronger arm. “She put manure in our shoes!” Rais said.

Ciala jumped off of her mother’s lap, her shoulders leaning towards her mean brothers. “Yeah, well you took over my blocks and then tricked me and Shantra into hiding in the closet! You’re both meanies!” she yelled right back, not intimidated in the least.

Ava rolled her eyes and held Ciala back. In that moment, a nanny carried Shantra into the room, all dressed and ready for bedtime.

“Stop!” Jiran roared out, ending the battle before it had begun. The nanny, startled by the chaos in the room, backed up a step and clutched her tiny charge closer to her chest.

“Not you,” he said to the nanny who smiled weakly.

Shantra wiggled out of the nanny’s arms and practically danced over to her brothers. She jumped up and down, clapping her hands. “Did you find the surprise? Did you? Did you?”

She looked over at her older sister, giggling in her excitement. “Should we show them?”

Ciala took her mother’s hand. “They found their surprises,” she said with pride.

Ava sighed with exasperation. “Did you tease the girls?” she asked of her three sons.

Ramzi stood up straighter. “She was being annoying, Mother! She wouldn’t leave us alone.”

Ava stared down at her daughter, eyebrows lifted. “So you tricked her into hiding in the closet?”

The three boys shrugged. “It got her to be quiet,” they explained, only slightly remorseful, and feeling that way only because they’d been caught.

Ciala’s eyes drifted up towards her father’s stern expression. “Why will I want to kiss a boy?” she asked with wide, brown eyes.

Ava and Jiran both lost the thread of the conversation with that question.

“Why would you want to kiss a boy?” her father asked, bending down to his daughter’s level, curious, but understanding that it probably had to do with one of his sons.

Ciala shrugged. “I don’t know. Ramzi said I would kiss a boy and then I would have to flip him over my shoulder.”

All eyes turned back to Ramzi who only crossed his arms over his chest. “I merely told her that, if a boy tries to kiss her, she should flip him.”

“Good!” her father said with a nod of agreement.

Ava’s hand slapped over her eyes. “Not good!” she argued. “What are you teaching her?” she demanded of her oldest son.

Ramzi was undeterred. “She shouldn’t be kissing boys mother!”

Ava threw her hands up in the air. “She’s five years old! She’s not going to be kissing anyone!”

“I want to kiss a boy!” Shantra sing-songed, once again jumping up and down. She then grabbed onto her father’s leg and kissed his knee. “I kissed a boy!” She tilted her head far backwards and grinned. “Now I flip you, Daddy?” she asked.

Jiran chuckled and lifted her into his arms. “Yes. Now you need to flip me over.”

Shantra giggled and laid her head on his shoulder. “I don’t want to flip you,” she told him and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Ava couldn’t believe what was happening and glared at her handsome husband. The look said, “Fix this,” and he had absolutely no idea how to accomplish that. He could direct armies and knew how to battle seen and unseen enemies, but the foibles of little girls and their brothers? He was lost.

Jiran knew what his wife was thinking and laughed, lifting his free hand into the air. “You’re the one who demanded daughters!” he announced.

Ava looked over at Ciala who was acting like she was escaping punishment. The boys were glaring at her as if they were about to dump her into a muddy pit and the nanny was still not sure what to do.

“Girls were supposed to be easier,” she grumbled.

## Chapter 4

“Hey brat!” Rais said as he walked into Shantra’s bedroom. He’d just come back from university and was amazed at how much he’d missed his annoying sisters.

Shantra was sitting in the middle of her bed, tears streaming down her eyes and his entire body went into battle mode. “What’s wrong, Shantra?” he demanded, moving quickly to the side of her bed.

Shantra looked up at her big brother as heavy tears rolled down her cheeks. “You’re home!” she said and stood up, throwing herself into his arms.

Rais caught his baby sister in his arms and held her close, but he still wasn’t sure what had hurt her. “Shantra, tell me what happened. Why are you so sad?”

Her skinny arms tightened around his neck. “He’s married!” she sobbed.

Rais heard a noise and turned to see that Ramzi and Turk had just entered the room as well. He couldn’t turn to fully face his brothers, but the look in his eyes told them enough. “Honey, who got married?” he asked, trying to figure out what was going on.

She pulled back, her dramatic flair for life in full evidence. “The man I’m in love with! He married another woman! He wouldn’t wait for me!” And with that announcement, she flopped onto her bed once more, an arm draping over her eyes as she sobbed out her desolation.

“Who did you fall in love with?” Turk demanded, his arms fisted at his waist. “I’m going to kill him!”

“You can’t!” Shantra sobbed. “I’d rather he be happy than dead. He deserves to be happy. He’s given me so much happiness already in my life.” She sighed once more. “I suppose it was too much to ask that he wait another four years for me.”

Ramzi’s mind was spinning. “What happens in four years?” he asked, still trying to figure out how a man had gotten through palace security enough times to make his baby sister fall in love with him. “Was it one of the guards?” That would make sense. The guard would be fired, but at least it would make sense.

Shantra pulled her arm away from her eyes. “A guard? Are you kidding? Those men are old!” she said with disdain.

The three brothers stared at their baby sister, at a complete loss.

Ciala stepped into the room and squealed when she saw the three of them together. “You’re home!” she said and raced across the room to hug each of them. “I can’t believe you’re home! And you didn’t come by to say anything to me!”

“We were on our way but something is wrong with Shantra,” Rais said.

All four of them turned back around, looking at Shantra who looked desolate.

Ciala rolled her eyes. “Ignore her. That gross-looking rock star, Dakota Lafayette, married over the weekend and she’s upset because she says that she would have loved him more, if only he’d waited until she was eighteen and old enough to marry.”

Ramzi, Rais and Turk all puffed up. “She’s not marrying anyone at eighteen!” Rais commanded. Ramzi and Turk both nodded their heads.

“I’m never marrying,” Shantra said with additional drama. “I’ll never love any man again! It hurts too much.” A fresh bout of tears streamed down her cheeks.

Ramzi, Turk and Rais all looked at her, then at each other. Then the three of them turned to Ciala for an explanation.

“Just ignore her,” she said. “She’ll get over Dakata’s betrayal. Shantra was in love with Mark Washington last week. This latest obsession is new.”

Turk didn’t understand. “Who the hell are Dakota Lafayette and Mark Washington?”

“And how did they get into the palace?” Ramzi demanded.

Ciala laughed softly. “Shantra has never met them. They are rock singers she’s only obsessing about. Don’t worry about it. She’ll move on and by next week, there will be another guy.”

Shantra stood up and jumped off of her bed, unaware of the pictures that tumbled to the floor in the process. “I’m going to the kitchen to smother my heartbreak with chocolate ice cream. Anyone want to join me?” she asked.

Ramzi shook his head. “Do we have to be in love with someone to join her?”

Ciala snorted. “Like the three of you would ever fall in love with just one woman,” and she walked out the door, more than ready to eat chocolate ice cream if it would help her little sister get over this latest drama. “I think the chef made those chocolate chip cookies too,” she told the guys.

“She’s right about falling in love,” Turk mumbled. “No way!”

Ramzi grimaced. “Too many women to love before we have to marry.”

“And even then, there’s always a wealth of possibilities,” Rais agreed.

The three young men laughed as they followed their little sisters down the hallway to the kitchen. Love, they scoffed. They would never fall victim to that girly emotion they all silently vowed.



*Excerpt from Pregnant with the Sheik's Baby, Book one in The Samara Royal Family Series*

Mia Fortelle stared up at the beautiful dress on display with longing, completely oblivious to the biting, cold wind or the other pedestrians rushing around her. “Goodness, wouldn’t that be lovely,” Mia sighed as she looked through the store’s window, practically drooling over the beautiful coat made of warm, red wool. Or it might be cashmere. Mia had no idea, nor could she afford either. In fact, she couldn’t afford anything more than a wistful stare through the window. That particular coat from this designer probably cost as much as a whole month’s salary. Possibly even two months’, she thought with grim acceptance as she pulled her boring, brown tweed coat closer around her body, trying to stave off the frigid cold of yet another brutal Montreal winter. A teacher’s salary wasn’t a whole lot so a month’s paycheck probably wouldn’t cover that coat. Maybe the scarf, she thought with a chuckle.

“You should get it,” a deep voice said to her right.

Mia spun around to smile politely. She’d anticipated possibly the store manager or maybe just a passerby.

What she hadn’t anticipated, never could have imagined, was looking into the eyes of the most amazing man she’d ever seen in her life. Tall, extremely tall, with black hair and dark eyes, tanned skin, a hard nose and even harder jawline that was a bit darker than the rest of his face as his end-of-day beard made its presence known.

He was shockingly attractive and her body shivered once again, but this time, it wasn’t because of the cold. It was because of the man, his eyes, the way he was looking at her and the swell of feminine awareness that crept up inside of her with this man standing so close.

She opened her mouth to speak, but the words wouldn’t come. She was stunned by the amazing, shocking appeal of this man and not sure how to deal with such raw masculinity.

This wasn’t the kind of man she normally dealt with during her day. The most masculine man she’d come across during her weekly errands was the rough guy behind the meat counter with an enormous belly and a net over his beard.

This man was...he was...beyond words. He was compelling in a sensual, erotic way that instantly made her body throb with the need to press herself against him and find out what his mouth would feel like against her lips.

Never before had any man affected her so strongly and so instantly.

And he terrified her! She wasn’t the kind of woman who could handle a man like him!

“I’m sorry,” she said and bowed her head, starting to step around him so that she could hurry home. She stopped at this store every day, looking at the beautiful clothes that were changed out about every two weeks. It wasn’t even that she could wear those clothes, she told herself firmly as she prepared to walk away. Those clothes, and this man, were way out of her league. She was bowling alley, onion rings and movie theatre popcorn while this man was ballrooms, caviar and the best champagne. His tan, cashmere coat looked soft and warm as did the silk-lined scarf around his neck. The freezing wind was blowing his black hair, but she could tell that even that was an expensive haircut. Everything about him screamed wealth and power – two things she didn’t have, nor could she ever have with her career goals.

And that was okay! She loved her job, loved her kids and thrived on teaching. What wasn’t okay was the nervous way this man made her feel even as he stood two feet away from her. She didn’t like the way her knees wobbled or her heart pounded inside her chest.

“Please don’t go,” his deep voice urged and she felt his gloved hand reach out to gently touch the sleeve of her coat. Even through the thick layer of her winter coat as well as the sleeve of her sweater underneath, she still could feel the heat of his fingers and it was like a shock wave smashing through her senses.

Looking up into his dark eyes, she was so startled, she wasn’t sure what to say.

“Have dinner with me tonight,” he urged.

Mia shivered, those dark eyes promising her so much more than dinner. And a very large part of her brain wondered if she should accept. Just once in her life, she wanted to live on the wild side, to experience the kind of excitement this man’s eyes promised.

She opened her mouth to accept, to tell him yes and to find out more of that promise. But instead of agreeing to dinner, she shook her head. “I can’t,” she finally said even though she desperately wanted to say yes, which didn’t make any sense since all of her instincts were telling her to run away from this dangerous man. Why would she even hesitate? Why was she still standing here? Why was she looking up at this man as if she wanted to...do things that were so very wrong?

“Can’t?” he asked with a slight uplifting of those firm lips.

Ramzi watched the woman’s eyes, saw the indecision and knew that he was going to have this woman. He’d been watching her for several minutes, captured by the beautiful profile as she gazed into the window of the store. He wanted her. He couldn’t tell what her body was like because of the cheap, ugly winter coat, but he suspected she would be perfect. He was determined to find out just how perfect she really was. He actually had to restrain himself from reaching out and touching her porcelain skin.

And those eyes! They looked like sparkling aquamarine gems surrounded by a thick fan of dark lashes. Everything this beautiful, entrancing woman was thinking was

revealed in those shining depths. Never before had he seen such a color and he knew he could lose himself in that aquamarine gaze.

“I don’t think ‘can’t’ is in my vocabulary,” he teased. He caught the slight smile on her full lips a moment before she tried to hide it but it gave him courage. She started to step backwards but he took her hand, noticed the trembling even through her leather glove. “I’m not going to hurt you and I’m sorry if I’m scaring you. That isn’t my intention at all. I just would like to get to know you.” He paused slightly. “Perhaps if you just gave me your name, I would be satisfied.”

Mia laughed despite her nervousness. “I have a sneaking suspicion that giving you my name might only encourage you.” She knew that he was teasing her but she was so out of her depth with his kind of charm. “I have to go,” she said through stiff lips.

“Is your husband waiting for you?” he asked, once again stepping in her path so she had to stop.

The lovely woman immediately shook her head. “I’m not married,” she replied quickly.

Something relaxed inside of him. “Boyfriend then?” he asked carefully. He wasn’t willing to step into a marriage, but a boyfriend could be dismissed.

“I don’t...” she started to say, then shook her head again. “I’m sorry, but I don’t know you and I don’t normally talk to strangers. My only excuse is that you’re very charming and extremely handsome. But even so, you’ll have to excuse me,” she said and once again moved to step around him.

Ramzi allowed her to leave this time but he nodded to his bodyguard, indicating that the man should follow the woman with the dazzling eyes and the delightful smile. “We’ll meet again,” he told her, enjoying the way she peeked back towards him. And there it was, he thought with relish. A barely-there smile. Some might even say a challenging smile. That’s all the encouragement he needed.

Well, he didn’t even need that. He was confident enough to believe he could overcome any objections she might have to their relationship, but the smile helped. It told him so much more than just a smile. It told him that she was interested.

Ah, little lady, he thought, your days are numbered. We will be together.

By six o’clock that evening, he had a file folder with the woman’s information and he sat down with a glass of scotch to read.

In his experience, women were fickle, gravitating to the man who would give them the most but ready to move on to the next if something better entered their periphery. Normally, he was the “something better” that women eyed. Too many times, he’d seen women hanging off of one man’s arm only to get him in their sites and abandon their date/lover/husband.

He knew that he was cynical about the world. And there were probably women out there who weren't so mercenary. But so far, he hadn't run into one of them. Was this lovely Mia of the loyal-never-before-experienced members of the female gender?

He doubted it. He wasn't that lucky, he thought with cynicism.

She was certainly lovely enough to explore though.

She was twenty-four years old, two years out of university and working on her master's degree in education. She received excellent annual evaluations from both her supervisors as well as several letters of thanks from grateful parents of students in her class and, according to the interviews from some of the parents of her students, they all loved her. Her bank balance was painfully low, she had sadly lost both of her parents several years ago and was an only child. He absently wondered if she ever got lonely now that she was alone in the world.

Moving further into the quickly compiled report, he read through the list of her professional associations, all very impressive, plus several articles that she'd had published during her years at university as well as several more published in professional journals more recently.

The information was revealing, he thought as he set the file aside, but not nearly enough. The file didn't tell him all that he wanted to know. Soon, he thought. He'd get all of the information about his mysterious, shy lady very soon.

He didn't question why he needed details about this particular woman when in the past, his relationships had always remained much more superficial. A beautiful woman, intelligent conversation and a sensuous nature were all that he wanted or required from his female companionship. Well, and the ability to forget her when his interest waned.

He suspected that Ms. Fortelle was going to be a much more fascinating companion than his previous lovers had been.

The following day, Mia stood in her classroom doorway and stared at the enormous bouquet of pink roses sitting on her desk. She didn't want to touch them but kept telling herself that they weren't poisonous, that a snake wasn't going to jump out to bite her and there was no spider lurking within the beautiful blooms, ready to attack.

They were just flowers. Simple, beautiful flowers. Pink roses. No cliché red roses from that man.

Of course, the flowers might have been from someone else, she thought. They could be from that guy she'd met at the coffee shop last week, the one with the weird dimple in the middle of one cheek but not the other. They could be from that professor she'd spoken to at the teaching conference last month, the one where everyone had been bored out of their minds. He'd been a very handsome man, if slightly more lean than the man who had occupied her thoughts and her dreams for the past twenty hours.

“Are we going into the classroom, Ms. Fortelle?” one of her students asked.

Mia looked behind her, realized that her class was still standing outside in the hallway. She’d just walked all of them back from their music class and was trying to mentally prepare for their afternoon math session when she’d spotted the flowers that had been placed on the corner of her desk.

“Oooh! Ms. Fortelle got flowers!” one of the girls exclaimed, rushing past Mia and wiggling between the desks until she was standing at the corner of Mia’s desk where the roses were perched. With that announcement, chaos erupted with all of the students trying to catch a glimpse at the evidence of their favorite teacher’s romantic life.

As she stood in the doorway, Mia felt several of them crowding around her, some bumping into her back and hips in their effort to see the flowers. She knew it was time to get them settled down to their math work but she was actually afraid to enter the classroom, afraid of what the flowers meant.

Two other teachers sidled up to Mia, almost as excited as the kids. “Got a new hunk?” one of the other teachers asked with a knowing smile on her face.

The other teacher, older by about ten years, only smirked with cynicism. “Don’t get used to it, honey. Just enjoy the flowers now because the men don’t continue those sweet little gestures later on. Once they have that ring on your finger, romance goes out the door. Along with a lot of other fun stuff,” and she chuckled to herself as she continued walking down the hallway to her own classroom.

Mia shook herself and accepted that she was being silly. The flowers could be from anyone! Besides, the handsome man from the street yesterday wouldn’t know where she worked. They’d barely spoken! He didn’t even know her name, much less where she worked or even her occupation!

She was being ridiculous and class needed to start. “Okay everyone, settle down and find your seats,” she called out, stepping into the room and watching as all of her students crowded in, some of them properly going to their seats but a stubborn group still hovered around her desk, wanting to touch the delicate blossoms.

“To your seats,” she called out again, this time with a stern tone of voice. The students heard the authority in her voice this time and followed directions, moving quickly over to their chairs but still looking back at the flowers with longing. The girls were wishing that they had a beau who would send them flowers while the boys were wondering...well, she had no idea what little boys thought of flowers. Probably that they were stinky. She suspected that their opinions wouldn’t change as they aged but they would understand the significance to a woman. At least, she hoped that would happen.

“We’re going to be learning about...” and she started the class, focusing all of her energy on teaching the kids. It was a challenge though. The pink roses kept catching her eye, distracting her. Just as memories of the man had done all night and all morning. When she walked by her desk, she could smell the delicate scent and the color

continuously caught her eye, luring her closer. She resisted the urge as much as she could, but it was a challenge.

By the end of the day, after her last student had gone home, her classroom cleaned up and lessons prepared for the next day, she was exhausted. All she wanted to do was get home, curl up with a cup of tea and watch a movie. Something non-romantic so that she wouldn't even think about the man from the previous night or the way his eyes had shouted out a warning. A warning that her body had certainly understood! Was her body heeding that warning? Absolutely not! Nor had her mind stopped thinking about the note attached to the flowers.

She'd peeked but it hadn't proven anything. All that had been written was, "Beautiful flowers for a beautiful woman." Nothing else, no name, no initials, not even a clue as to who might have sent them to her.

But she knew. She hadn't gotten a name from the mysterious man last night, but she knew the pink roses were from him. She knew it and her heart thundered with that knowledge.

The man didn't play fair, she thought as she pulled her brown coat on, slid her hands into her worn out, leather gloves and grabbed her heavy tote bag filled with papers that she needed to grade tonight. Sending anonymous flowers was cheating, she thought. If she hadn't been so fascinated by the man, she might think that the gesture was a bit creepy. She should probably think it was creepy. After all, there was no note, no name. A little stalkerish.

But her heart throbbed with awareness of the man and his power over her mind even from a distance.

It was time to move on, she told herself firmly. She should throw the flowers away. As her hand fluttered over the light switch to her classroom, she considered doing exactly that. But in the end, the pink roses were simply too beautiful to destroy. And since she was never going to see the man again, what was the point?

She flipped the light switch off and walked out of the building, waving goodbye to the other teachers who were still finishing up in their classrooms.

She headed down the street and turned right onto Rue Sherbrook, pushing harder and making her feet walk faster. She refused to linger over the window displays today even though the weather was nicer, the wind not nearly as sharp as it had been the day before. When she started to approach the store that she loved so much, she slowed and bit her lip. She should...

Instead of going straight, she turned right and headed over to Rue Sainte-Catherine where there were more stores as well as small shops and restaurants. One of her favorite chocolate shops was over on that street as well but she ignored the call of a warm cup of hot chocolate, pushing forward to get home instead. This street reminded her of any other metropolitan city except there were lovely old churches hidden away among the tall

buildings. If she'd turned left, she could have lost herself in McGill University, but there were more hills that way as the streets led pedestrians to the Parc du Mont-Royal, the highest point in the city. She was already out of breath from walking so quickly. She didn't need to head uphill and make her trek even worse. All she wanted to do was avoid the man in question and pretend that the stimulating interlude yesterday hadn't happened.

When she finally came to her apartment, which was located in one of the older homes that had been converted to smaller units a few decades ago, she breathed a sigh of relief. And disappointment?

No, she thought as she unlocked her door. That was ridiculous! She wasn't disappointed that she hadn't run into her stranger. Good grief, she'd gone out of her way to make sure that she didn't see the man!

Her apartment was located in one of the older buildings near the Station Place-des-Arts. Every time she walked by the swings with the musical chimes playing, she smiled, thinking how wonderful it would be to bring her own children there one day. The chimes only played when someone swung on the swings so on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon in the spring or fall, it was like a musical heaven as all the swings were filled up with either laughing children or even adults interested in making the chimes ring.

She climbed the stairs to her apartment, wondering what the man was doing tonight. Was he sitting in some elegant restaurant, negotiating a huge deal for whatever company he worked for? Or had he found a sophisticated woman with sexy legs and blond hair, sipping a glass of wine with her? She banished that possibility, not liking the idea of her stranger with a blond woman. Or any woman for that matter.

Flicking on the lights, she came to a full stop for the second time today. She'd gotten one beautiful bouquet of pink roses at her school but...wow! The one bouquet was nothing compared to the sea of pink she was now viewing as she stood just inside the doorway. Her tiny apartment was completely filled with pink roses! They were everywhere! She couldn't even move into her apartment because the hallway was blocked by all of the vases filled with amazingly beautiful blooms. Her apartment smelled better than a perfume counter!

The burst of laughter that escaped her mouth was startling in the silence. She'd dated a few guys in the past. No one could ever call her a player in the dating world, but she'd had a flattering number of invitations.

But no man had ever come close to this. No man had ever done anything so outrageously extravagant.

Carefully, so that she didn't tumble any flower-filled vases over, she set her tote bag down and moved into her apartment, looking around in wonder and awe. Peering into the kitchen, she realized that there was no space on the counters. There were even bouquets of pink roses on top of her fridge. Moving deeper into the apartment, she looked at her bedroom and blushed because, sure enough, there were pink roses on every

flat surface and several on the floor. Obviously the delivery person had run out of places to set the vases because there were about twenty of them on the floor of her den area.

This was crazy, she thought, covering her mouth with her hand to stop herself from smiling like a loon.

She wasn't going to question how the man had found out where she lived. That might be a bit too weird. Obviously, he had resources but she hadn't gotten the serial killer or rapist vibe from him last night. Of course, her senses might have been off kilter because of the electricity she'd felt coming from his light touch, but she was going with her gut on this man. He was dangerous, but not in the normal criminal manner.

When the doorbell rang, she knew exactly who it was. She didn't even consider not opening the door this time. Of course, having a huge number of roses delivered to one's house did not make the man un-dangerous. Not in any way. But there was just something about the gesture that called to her. She wanted to see him, wanted to understand what kind of man would do something so crazy.

Sure enough, as soon as she opened the door, her eyes looked upwards to find the man's dark eyes looking down at her.

"Vous etes un fou," she told him without thinking. She couldn't wipe the silly grin from her features even as she called him a fool in French.

One dark eyebrow went up in reaction. "Excuse me?" he prompted and leaned forward, handing her a single pink rose.

She blinked and realized that she'd spoken in French instead of English and shook her head. "Sorry. I said you're a fool, sir."

His eyes lightened and she felt the temperature in the apartment increase by about twenty degrees. "Ah, you speak French when you're flustered." He moved closer. "I think I like that about you. Very sexy."

Mia realized she was holding her breath and filled her lungs. Unfortunately, the air was filled with his scent which was spicy and inviting and oh-so-alluring. "What are you doing here?"

He smiled slightly. "I came to see if you'd gotten my message."

Her eyes laughed even though she wouldn't allow herself to do the same. She felt a girlish giggle starting to bubble up but she tamped it down mercilessly. "That you're insane?" she asked, gesturing behind her at all of the flowers. Everywhere!

His deep chuckle did something deep inside of her. Something sinful and sexy and her body wanted to just curl up around this man and his scent as well as that shocking laughter.

"That I would like to take you out to dinner tonight."

She pulled back, surprised that he looked serious. "Really?"



His hands moved up to turn her ever so slightly towards the banquet of roses. “It was in the note.”

She was confused and looked back up at him. “The note?” Why couldn’t she stop staring at him? He was a devastatingly handsome man, but that shouldn’t mean anything to her. She should be looking inward, towards who he was as a person. Was she truly so superficial?

“There was a note,” he confirmed, nodding his head slightly.

She sighed. “You’ve got to be kidding, right? I just got home and saw all of this. There’s no way I would be able to find a note in this gesture.”

Ramzi watched the beautiful woman carefully, enjoying the way she blushed when he moved closer, sighed when he stepped slightly away from her and lowered those long, dark lashes when she tried to hide both reactions from him. She was right here with him, her attraction just as strong as what he was feeling towards her.

For the first time, he looked in at her apartment and noticed the sea of pink. He’d been so intent on watching her animated features that he hadn’t noticed the insane number of flowers. Her apartment was indeed filled to the brim with flowers. “I didn’t realize that your home was so small,” he explained with another deep chuckle. He stepped past her and glanced around. When he found what he was looking for, he lifted the small, white envelope out of the bouquet and handed it to her.

“I believe this will explain.”

Mia’s eyes filled with amusement but she accepted the envelope, pulling out the card. “Dinner tonight. Seven o’clock.”

“That’s all?” she asked, laughing softly at the note that was more of a command than a request for a date. “It wasn’t even a question, sir. And no, I don’t know your name so there’s no possibility of me going out to dinner with you.”

He leaned forward, backing her against the wall. “Pasta covered in cheese and sauce, maybe some seafood mixed in with lots of garlic, bread with real butter,” he said the words softly, as if they were a caress and she felt them all the way down to her toes.

“Real butter?” she whispered, her eyes dropping to his lips. “I don’t eat real butter,” she replied.

His hand came up, a long finger sliding down her cheek to caress her and to appease his curiosity at what she would feel like. “Tonight, live on the wild side and have real butter. And chocolate dessert with extra cream and top off the evening with...” he almost said “me” but held back, instinctively knowing that he’d have to move slower with this woman, “the most excellent brandy you’ve ever tasted.”

Mia unconsciously licked her lips and sighed. “I can’t imagine the most excellent brandy,” she replied back, falling under his spell even though she knew she should kick him out and run as far away from him as she could.

His smile grew with her words. “Then I shall have to teach you about the fabulous world of brandy.”

“Brandy,” she whispered, sensing he was coming closer but her mind couldn’t focus on his proximity. Only his mouth and his incredible, masculine smell that was now surrounding her. Brandy might be nice, but this man’s scent was the most potent aphrodisiac she’d ever experienced.

“Among other things,” he returned.

Mia shivered at the idea of “other things”. She wanted to know what he might be referring to, but her lips couldn’t form the words. A part of her was too afraid of those “other things”. She knew she should not want those “other things”.

But she did! Oh, goodness, she wanted those “other things” with this man so badly, she could almost taste them! In less than twenty-four hours and with only a smattering of conversation between them, she was almost panting after this man with a scandalous lack of decorum.

*If you enjoyed this excerpt, look for *Pregnant with the Sheik’s Baby* at your favorite e-book retailer. It’s available for preorder now!*

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