



## Monarch of the Sands

By Sharon Kendrick

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**Monarch of the Sands** By Sharon Kendrick

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After all, he's now the Sheikh of Khayarzah—England's suburbia is hardly his regular stomping ground! But he is as achingly gorgeous as ever...and Francesca's certainly tempted by Zahid's invitation to come to the desert and work for him.

Zahid finds the geeky, gauche teenager he once knew is now an understated beauty. Embarking on a secret affair is bittersweet—but, however all-consuming their passion, Zahid's duty to his kingdom must surely come first?

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## Monarch of the Sands By Sharon Kendrick Bibliography

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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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Against her pale skin, the diamond flashed like a shooting star and Frankie gazed at it in wonder. Who would ever have thought it? Geeky, freaky Frankie O'Hara engaged to be married—and sporting a solitaire the size of a blueberry.

Spreading out her fingers, she watched as the precious stone caught the pale November light and glittered it back at her. Her father would have smiled and said that a diamond was nothing but a hard and highly refractive form of carbon—but to Frankie it was so much more than that. It was a symbol. It signified that a man loved her and wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. A handsome, successful man, too. Not the kind of man she'd ever have thought would be attracted to someone like her—not in the million or so years it took to make a diamond.

The low roar of a car disturbed her dreamy thoughts and Frankie blinked with surprise and a slight feeling of panic. Surely Simon wasn't here already? Why, she hadn't peeled a single potato for the celebration meal she'd been planning—and surely the chicken breasts hadn't been marinating for nearly long enough?

She peered out of the window and the breath caught sharply in her throat as she saw the expensive and gleaming vehicle which was making its way up the drive, spraying little shoals of gravel in its wake.

That certainly wasn't Simon—who drove a comfortable saloon indistinguishable from the many others which dominated the roads of this affluent area of suburban England. The car which was now pulling to a halt in front of the house was sporty, black and powerful and looked as if it would be more at home on an international racing circuit than in this quiet corner of the world. And she didn't have to look at the driver's hard profile to know exactly who was driving it.

Zahid!

Her heart began to pound and Frankie's mouth became parchment-dry. After all, the man in question was pretty close to every woman's fantasy man and he was sitting right outside her house. Zahid Al Hakam—royal Sheikh and King. The man with the hard, hawklike features and the dark, enigmatic eyes.

It was highly unusual for someone as ordinary as Frankie to be friends with an exotic and powerful sheikh, but life often had funny twists and turns along the way. The sheikh's father had been a long-time friend of her father's, so she'd known the Prince of Khayarzah ever since she'd been a little girl—though his visits had tapered away since he had unexpectedly become King. The sudden death of his uncle and his cousin had left Zahid as the heir apparent—with no time in his busy diary to visit old friends in small English towns.

At first, she'd missed his visits dreadfully, before deciding that his absence was probably all for the best—because hadn't she wasted too many hours fantasising about a man who was way out of her league?

She glanced out of the window again. So why had he just turned up out of the blue? And why today, of all days?

She saw him get out of the car—unfolding his long-legged frame with the lithe elegance which always made her think of a jungle cat. He slammed the car door but didn't bother locking it—though, come to think of it, he'd probably stationed his security people at the end of the drive. And besides, who would dare try and steal *his* car?

The pealing of the doorbell galvanised her into life—and as she rushed to answer it she thought that wasn't the only thing which was peeling. The walls badly needed painting. The big house was inevitably showing signs of wear and tear—despite her best efforts to try to maintain the place. And didn't that only reinforce Simon's increasingly urgent suggestion that she sell the family home and the valuable land on which it stood?

Heart still pounding, she pulled open the door and psyched herself up to greet him, praying that she might have grown up and moved on enough not to be affected by him. Five long years had passed since she'd last seen him—surely enough time to give her some kind of immunity against him.

Vain hope. She swallowed, trying to quell the rush of guilty longing which made her heart begin to race as she stared into his stern face. Because was there a woman on earth who could have been unmoved by his presence—even if they had just agreed to marry someone else?

He wasn't how most people expected a sheikh to look—with not a flowing robe in sight—but that was deliberate. Years ago, he had told her that he liked to blend in—like the chameleon who adapted its appearance to its habitat in order to survive. That was the reason why he was fluent in several languages and spoke them like a native. Except that someone as rugged and as powerful as Zahid could never really *blend* in. No matter what he said or wore, he drew the eye and caught people's attention, just as a beautiful bloom tossed on a dusty roadside might have done.

Clad in a beautifully cut grey suit, which showcased the musculature of his magnificent body, he completely dominated the doorway of her house. Eyes like chips of black stone surveyed her from a hawk-featured face, his skin a shade lighter than burnished copper. With that raven-dark hair, he looked like some brooding movie-star of yesteryear, she thought, with a sudden and unwanted ache. He was all stillness and silence—while managing to exude a raw and undeniable animal magnetism.

For some inexplicable reason, Frankie plunged her left hand deep into the pocket of her jeans and a wave of guilt shivered through her. Was she *trying to hide her brand-new engagement ring*? And *why on earth was she doing that*?

'Hello, Zahid,' she said.

Few people—and especially commoners—were permitted to use his first name, but Zahid wasn't thinking about protocol at that moment. For a moment there was complete silence as his gaze raked over her in astonishment. Surely there must be some kind of mistake?

'Francesca?' His eyes narrowed—as if he'd been confronted by a mirage in the middle of the desert. 'Is that really you?'

Frankie tried not to react. *Nobody* called her Francesca. Nobody except him. She heard the familiar way he curled the syllables around his tongue and a stupid little shiver whispered over her skin. It was a name given to her by her glamorous mother who had been hoping for a mini-me and been bitterly disappointed. When

the duckling child had stubbornly refused to become a swan, the exotic tag had disappeared and been replaced by the much more workaday 'Frankie' and that was what she'd been ever since. But not to Zahid.

'Of course it's me!' she said, but she wouldn't have been human if she hadn't felt a sudden rush of pleasure at that flash of very grown-up appreciation in his eyes. He'd never looked at her in any way other than the way he might have regarded a faithful retainer. A loyal servant, say—or a pet dog who came running over with its tail wagging eagerly. She knew that her question was an unnecessary one but she wanted to hear how Zahid would answer it. 'Why, do I look different?'

He felt a flicker of something unexpected. Damned right she did. Different didn't even come close to it. Last time he'd seen her, she'd been a tomboyish nineteen-year-old, so nondescript and shapeless that you'd never have noticed her in a crowd. So what the hell had happened in the intervening years?

He studied her closely. The short hair, which used to stick out at odd angles, had been allowed to grow so that now it fell in dark, silken waves down her back. The thick, geeky glasses had disappeared and instead he could see a pair of eyes which were a deep shade of startling blue. And the shapeless clothes she used to wear had been replaced by a pair of snug jeans and a soft oatmeal sweater, which hinted at a body he would never have imagined Francesca possessing.

'What the hell happened to your glasses?' he demanded unevenly.

'Oh, I wear contacts now.' She shrugged. 'Everybody does.'

He wanted to ask when had she developed such an amazing pair of breasts and a bottom which was curvier than a scimitar? He wanted to know when the dramatic transformation from girl to woman had taken place—but he stopped himself by biting back the faintly erotic questions. Because this was *Francesca* he was talking to—sweet, innocent little Francesca—not some potential lover he'd just met at a cocktail party.

Instead, he fixed her with a cool look, which was intended to remind her that although he was a family friend of long-standing he still expected a degree of formality and protocol.

Frankie saw the faint furrow which had appeared on his brow and correctly interpreted it. 'Oh, forgive me! Would you...?' She opened the door a little wider, unable to decide whether she wanted him to go or to stay. Because if he stayed—wouldn't it unsettle her? Wouldn't it risk starting those stupid fantasies again—the ones she used to get whenever he strode into the house? The ones which had always ended with Zahid scooping her up in his arms and starting to kiss her before telling her that he couldn't live without her. 'Would you like to come in?' she finished weakly.

No, he'd driven down from London to stand on her doorstep like a salesman! 'Thanks,' he said drily, and walked into the hallway—a place which was at once both alien and familiar to him. A large and faintly shabby English home with a big, green garden. Yet hadn't this been the one place outside his homeland where he had always been able to kick back and relax? A place where nobody watched him or where there were no indiscreet gossips or the threat of someone talking to the press. Because being the sheikh's nephew meant that you were always watched; always listened to.

Over the years, his father used to bring him here—to talk to the man who had changed the course of his country's history. France...

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