



THE SHEIKH'S WAYWARD WIFE (Harlequin comics)

By Sandra Marton

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Layla has been cursed with terrible luck ever since she decided to fly to the desert nation of Al Ankhara in search of the father she never knew. After their reunion, her father tricks her, locks her up in his estate and gives her away, as if she's an object, to be married to an unknown enemy! But it's not like Layla to give up easily. She manages to escape her guard and make a run for it, until she's spotted by none other than the handsome and haughty Sheikh Halil.

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THE SHEIKH'S WAYWARD WIFE (Harlequin comics) By Sandra Marton Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #532475 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-04-16
- Released on: 2016-04-16
- Format: Kindle eBook



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Sandra Marton is a best-selling author for Harlequin Presents. Her stories all feature the sexy, gorgeous, complex, tough on the outside but tender on the inside Alpha heroes she loves to create. A four-time RITA finalist, Sandra has won eight Romantic Times Reviewers' Choice Awards for Best Harlequin Presents of the Year and she's been honored with Romantic Times' Career Achievement Award for Series Romance. Sandra lives in Connecticut with her husband.

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He stood on a terrace outside the Grand Ballroom, looking over the deserted beach and the sea. A crescent moon hung in the sky, a cool ivory scimitar against the fiery backdrop of stars.

The pleasant sounds of conversation and music drifted through the partially opened doors behind him but he was alone.

Alone and annoyed.

The night was soft, the view enchanting, but Khalil had come to Al Ankhara on business, not in search of pleasure. So far no business had taken place.

He was familiar with everything here. The great Moorish palace. The white sand. The endless sea. He had been born here, not just in Al Ankhara but in the palace itself, born to all it represented. Legend said his nation was as ancient as the sea, as timeless as the desert. Once it had been a country of warriors. Now it was struggling to find itself in a new and different world.

Khalil was a part of both worlds. His heart would always be here, in this harsh and beautiful land, but his life was in New York City where he had lived for the past decade.

A frown crossed his ruggedly handsome face.

He had arrived early this morning, summoned by his father on what the older man had called an urgent matter of state.

The summons had come at an inconvenient time but Khalil, although not a believer in some of the old ways, *did* believe in showing respect to one's father.

That his father was also the sultan gave the summons added weight.

He'd read the e-mail, cursed softly, then phoned to arrange for his private jet, leaving a billion-dollar deal on the table and a new mistress alone in her bed. Hours later he'd stepped off the plane, ready for anything....

And instead been greeted as if his homecoming was nothing but a usual visit.

Sheikh Khalil al Kadar, Crown Prince of Al Ankhara, Protector of his People, Heir to the Throne of the Lion and the Sword and, for all he knew, possessor of a dozen other outmoded titles, tucked his hands in the pockets of his trousers and sighed in frustration.

His father, surrounded by the usual coterie of ministers, had greeted him warmly.

"Excellent, my son," he'd said. "You wasted no time in getting here."

"Of course not, Father," Khalil had replied. "Your message spoke of urgency."

"It did, yes." One of the ministers moved closer and whispered to the sultan, who nodded, then clapped Khalil on the shoulder. "Right now, however, I have business to attend to."

"But this urgent matter...?"

"In a little while," the sultan had said, and hurried off.

The "little while" had gone from minutes to hours and as it did, Khalil's attitude had gone from curiosity to impatience to glowering irritation. His mood had not been improved when his father's private secretary had knocked at the door of his rooms in late afternoon to inform him that the sultan would see him at the state dinner scheduled for the evening.

Just thinking about it now made a muscle knot in Khalil's jaw.

How "urgent" could a thing be, if it was to be discussed while two hundred guests milled about?

Khalil had done his best to be pleasant during the meal, but he'd felt his temper rising. Finally he'd excused himself and come out on the terrace where he could pace its length, check his watch, wonder what in hell was going on and—

What was that?

A figure stepped from the shadow of the palace and began walking quickly along the beach toward the sea. Khalil frowned. Who could it be? The hour was late. More to the point, the area was private, restricted for the use of the sultan's household, and securely guarded.

One of the guests? No. The figure wore a hooded *djelle-bah*. A man's garment. But the men here tonight were all wearing dark dinner suits.

Khalil moved closer to the railing.

Besides, this couldn't be a man. The figure was too slight. A boy, then. A servant—but surely they would know that the sultan, a believer in the old ways, would not approve of a servant taking a stroll on this bit of royal land.

The boy had reached the place at which sea and sand met. Khalil's eyes narrowed. Was he imagining that there was tension visible in the line of the child's shoulders, the rigidity of his spine?

The boy took a step forward. The sea foamed around his ankles. Around his legs, soaking the *djellebah*, wrapping it around them.

What the hell was the kid up to?

It was a fool's question. The boy was walking steadily into the sea—a sea that dropped sharply only twenty feet from shore and was often home to hungry, man-eating sharks. Khalil cursed, grabbed the railing and vaulted onto the sand.

Layla's heart had been beating so hard as she slipped out the door of the harem that she'd been sure everyone could hear it.

She was amazed she'd gotten this far.

She'd slipped away without any of her guards noticing. Not that they called themselves guards. The two women who never let her out of their sight were her servants, according to her father, and when she'd glared at him and demanded to know what was the function of her third "servant," an enormous thug with a pockmarked face and missing teeth, he'd said that Ahmet was for her protection.

"Al Ankhara may look like a land of fantasy," he'd said, "but it is not."

That, at least, was true. Al Ankhara might look like something out of the Arabian Nights, with its minarets and Moorish arches, but it wasn't. What had happened to her in the past few days proved it.

But she had not let herself think about that tonight.

Instead, she had concentrated on escaping. The question was, how?

She and her so-called servants were in a separate part of the palace. It must have been beautiful once. Now the marble floors were dulled by age, the silk carpets were threadbare and the walls were grimy. The windows, looking out on an empty stretch of beach, were barred with decorative ironwork. The door that led into the palace was securely bolted; the lock on the door that gave onto the beach looked as if it hadn't been opened in the last century.

In other words, Layla was trapped.

Then, just before sunset, her luck changed.

A ship appeared. A yacht, if you wanted to be specific. It anchored off the beach. Two hundred, three hundred yards, maybe further out than that, but what did such a distance mean to a woman who was desperate?

How could she get to it? Not twenty minutes later, she had the answer.

She found a hairpin.

It wasn't the kind of little thing sold in drugstores. This pin was enormous, made of brass or copper. Or gold, for all she knew. What mattered was its size, its strength...

And that she could use it to jimmy the lock on the outside door as soon as her captors settled in for the night. Watching all those old movies about plucky heroines turning hatpins into tools might end up being the best thing she'd ever done.

She tucked the hairpin into a crack in the wall and waited.

The women brought her a plate of food, then waddled off to join Ahmet. Layla pushed the food around but didn't eat it. Soon, the women returned. She let them draw her a bath, let them dry her and powder her, but when they reached for a nightgown, she shook her head and mimed that she was cold.

The women snorted with laughter. Well, why not? Everything about her amused them. Her blond hair. Her blue eyes. Her pale skin and bony—in their eyes—body. That she should feel chilly when the temperature

was probably just a few degrees short of spontaneous combustion was just one more thing that made them guffaw.

Instead of the gown, they'd dressed her in a *djellebah*.

"You sleep now," one had commanded, and Layla had dutifully gone to the alcove they'd designated as hers.

She'd waited until she heard a chorus of earth-shattering snores. Then she'd tiptoed to the locked door.

Minutes later, after some adept hairpin jiggling in the lock, Layla was free.

She'd wanted to race down to the sea, but what if someone was looking out the windows of the palace? She had to look casual, so she'd walked slowly along the sand. When she reached the water, she'd debated shucking off the *djellebah*, reminded herself she had no way of knowing who she'd find on that boat, still rocking gently at anchor. She'd just started into the water—

Something barreled into her.

Something big. Something powerful.

A man.

Strong arms closed around her from behind. Lifted her off her feet. She cried out, as much with fury as with fear. How could Ahmet have caught her this quickly?

Except, it wasn't Ahmet.

The feel of the body pressed to hers was hard and lean, not layered with fat. The arms encircling her were taut with muscle. Even the man's smell was not Ahmet's. Her horrible guard stunk of sweat and grease. The man who'd hoisted her in the air, who was grunting as she fought him, smelled of nothing but the sea and a hint of expensive cologne.

She was not going to be handed over to a fat bandit seeking a wife, Layla thought in disbelief, she was going to be raped by a hard-bodied, clean-smelling stranger!

Then she stopped thinking and screamed.

The scream damn near pierced Khalil's eardrums.

A woman? The creature fighting him like a wild thing wasn't a boy; it was a woman.

Very much a woman.

Holding her this way, tilted back against his body, there was no doubt about her sex. The hood of the *djellebah* had fallen back; her wild, silken hair was in his face, her backside was in his groin, her breasts...

Her breasts were damn near cupped in his hands.

By Ishtar, what was going on?

He was sure of only one thing. This was not the time to try and find out. She was doing her best to get loose. Well, fine. He would let her go as soon as she stopped trying to kill him. Okay, maybe that was an

exaggeration, but her elbows were sharp as she slammed them into his gut, her heels were tattooing against his shins...

And that backside.

Small. Firm. Elegant. She was grinding it into his groin and, damn it, his perfidious body was starting to react.

"Bass," he snarled. *"Bass!"*

He might as well have said "stop" to a tiger. Khalil grunted, jerked her harder against him and put his mouth to her ear. *"Shismak!"* he demanded.

She ...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Stover:

As people who live in the actual modest era should be change about what going on or information even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era and that is always change and make progress. Some of you maybe will probably update themselves by reading through books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to a person is you don't know which one you should start with. This THE SHEIKH'S WAYWARD WIFE (Harlequin comics) is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and need in this era.

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