



The Marcelli Princess (The Marcelli Sisters of Pleasure Road, Book 5)

By Susan Mallery

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A smart, independent woman with a gorgeous four-year-old son, Mia Marcelli lost her one true love. Four years ago, while working undercover for the CIA, she watched Diego, the father of her unborn child, perish before her very eyes -- crumbling the world around her. But one morning she awakens to find Diego lying next to her, alive and well with an unbelievable confession: he is really Rafael, Prince of Calandria, and he had been working covertly on the same mission when they met -- his death had been staged. Utterly stunned, Mia is wary and delighted -- she may have suffered a broken heart, but her breathtakingly handsome lover is back to reignite the passion that existed between them. Little does she know that Rafael has returned to give his newfound son a proper upbringing back in Calandria -- even if it means seducing Mia into marriage. But when Rafael finds himself truly falling for this luscious beauty, he must decide between his royal duties and the woman who has claimed his heart.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The finale of Mallery's Marcelli family series (after *The Marcelli Bride*) is a charming but exasperating misfire. Mia Marcelli is shocked to wake up in her California home next to the father of her four-year-old son, a man she believed had been killed. It turns out that he's not the thief she thought he was, but rather Crown Prince Rafael of Calandria. She doesn't yet know it, but he's come to claim his love child and heir—and once his son is on Calandrian soil, Mia will have no legal rights to him. Rather than deal honestly with Mia, Rafael schemes to get his son before the truth is revealed, giving him all the more work to do when the time comes to redeem himself. Most of the previously introduced Marcelli clan return in this book, but Mia and her family are its best part. The sexist, duty-bound Rafael is a one-note brooder who doesn't do much to win over the reader, despite some humor and strong chemistry between the leads. Mia's unlikely history as a secret agent and the "disguised prince's secret baby" premise may require more suspension of disbelief than readers can spare, though series fans will find much to enjoy in the family dynamics. (*Mar.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

About the Author

New York Times bestselling author Susan Mallery has entertained millions of readers with her witty and emotional stories about women. Publishers Weekly calls Susan's prose "luscious and provocative," and Booklist says "Novels don't get much better than Mallery's expert blend of emotional nuance, humor and superb storytelling." Susan lives in Seattle with her husband and her tiny but intrepid toy poodle. Visit her at www.SusanMallery.com.

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Chapter One

Mia Marcelli was used to sleeping alone so it came as something of a shock to wake up with a strange man in her bed. She did what any other self-actualized, self-defense-trained woman would do -- she screamed and jumped to her feet.

"Big mistake," she yelled as she backed toward the door. "You shouldn't have broken in here. I have access to weapons, and grandmothers who don't like this sort of thing. My brother's a former Navy SEAL."

The man sat up and smiled at her. "I see you still talk too much, Mia. When an unknown man appears in your bed, you should run."

He knew her name. That startled her nearly as much as the fact that he was giving her advice. It didn't seem like normal behavior for a guy intent on raping and pillaging. Assuming anyone really pillaged these days.

She paused by the door and pushed her bangs out of her face. There was something familiar about the man. The hair and eye color were all wrong, but the shape of his face reminded her of someone. And that mouth -- she would remember it until she died.

"Diego?" she breathed, knowing this stranger couldn't be him. Diego was dead. She'd seen the bullets hit his

body, had watched him fall to the ground. There'd been so much blood.

"Am I that different?" the man asked as he stood and smiled at her. "Has so much changed?"

It was him, she thought, too stunned to do much more than gasp. "H-how is this possible? Why aren't you dead? I saw you die. Dead people don't have conversations."

"It is a long story. Perhaps one I could tell you over breakfast."

That voice. She would know it anywhere. It had haunted her dreams for the past five years.

Dead people also don't eat. "Get back," she said, feeling both shocked and angry. When in doubt, get pissed off.

It was a philosophy she'd learned worked for her. "I don't know what this game is, but I'm not playing it."

"Mia, it is I. You must recognize me."

"Must I?"

Right now she didn't have to do anything but keep from having a heart attack from the shock, and wish she kept a weapon in her room. Something big and scary.

The bedroom door flew open and her two grandmothers burst inside. Grandma Tessa had a fire poker in one hand, and Grammy M threatened Diego with a rolling pin.

"Call Joe," Tessa ordered Mia. "He'll take care of this scumbag."

Scumbag? Someone had been watching just a little too many police dramas.

"I'm not sure he's a scumbag," Mia said, still finding it difficult to believe her own eyes. "I might know this guy."

"You do know me," he said, his voice washing over her like a familiar and welcome memory. "Mia, it is I."

Diego? Was it possible? Conflicting emotions raced through her. She wanted to run into his arms and have him hold her forever. At the same time she wanted to grab the poker and beat him over the head with it.

"You're supposed to be dead," she said, still confused and angry, and maybe just a little scared. Because if this guy really was Diego, she was going to have a lot of explaining to do.

"So you keep saying," he told her, sounding more amused than anything else. "Would you be more happy if I were?"

"It would make more sense. I don't believe in ghosts...or vampires."

He actually smiled. "Good, because I am neither. Mia," -- he took a step toward her -- "trust your eyes and your heart. I am the man you knew as Diego."

"We don't trust people who pretend to be someone else," Grandma Tessa said with surprising force despite her small stature and advanced years. "Who do you think you are now?"

"I know I am Rafael, Crown Prince of Calandria."

Mia rolled her eyes. Great -- a crazy man in her bedroom, and she hadn't even had coffee yet. "Right, and I'm the Sleeping Beauty."

This had gone on long enough. Mia took the poker from her grandmother and held it out in front of her. "That's it. I don't know who you are or what you want, but you're in big trouble. Grammy M, call Joe." She shook the poker at the intruder. "As for you, big guy, you stay right there or I'll take you out. Don't think I can't. I've had professional training."

The man who looked amazingly like Diego had the balls to smile at her again. "I'm not going anywhere, Mia. I came to see you. I've waited five years to be with you again. I can certainly wait until you're willing to listen to reason."

Reason? "Not my strong suit. I'm more into react now, say 'Oops' later. If you're who you say you are, you should know that."

"I know many things, including the fact that you once wore a silver ring bought in a market. It was a foolish trinket, yet oddly valuable to us both."

Mia's gaze involuntarily darted to the bottom drawer of her dresser. She remembered the ring and the man who bought it for her.

He took a step closer. "I know other things," he said, his voice low and seductive. "I know how you like to be kissed and touched and where you like to -- "

"Hey," she said loudly, doing her best to both shut him up and break the spell he attempted to weave. "Grandmothers present. Let's avoid too much information."

Slowly she lowered the poker and looked at him. He was the right height and physical type. His voice was the same, as was his arrogance. His smile made her thighs go up in flames, which hadn't happened even once in the past five years. She wanted to believe because once she'd loved him so much, she'd thought knowing he was dead was going to kill her, too.

But what about the other changes? The color of his eyes, the hair, the scar? Then she remembered her brief time in a world of deception and secrecy, where people could easily be made to look different. Contact lenses, a quick dye job, and little glue -- voilà, a new man.

"I assume you have some ID on you," she said, trying to hold on to her anger, because it was safe. Only she was feeling more confused than anything else. Shouldn't she get coffee before an event like this? And maybe a cinnamon roll?

"Walk to the window," he said.

She raised the poker again and shook it at him. "You walk to the window."

He sighed. "I see you are still stubborn. Very well, Mia, we will walk together."

She eyed him warily as he moved to the window and pulled open the drapes. Keeping him at arm's-plus-poker length, she glanced down and saw a very shiny black car complete with what looked like flags flying from the front. Flags amazingly similar to the royal coat of arms of Calandria.

"So you have access to a limo, and an active imagination. That proves nothing." Actually, it kind of proved something, but she wasn't going to admit that.

He raised both hands. "As you wish. May I show you my passport?"

Her throat tightened and her mouth went dry. Man, she really wanted to brush her teeth and take a shower and get some coffee. Because after all those normal activities, none of this would be real anymore.

"Sure," she muttered. "Whatever."

But her heart began to beat faster. She didn't know if she accepted the premise that he was Diego, back from the dead, but she was halfway to being convinced. Which made no sense and gave her a stomachache.

If Diego wasn't dead, then where the hell had he been for the past five years and why hadn't he found her and told her the truth? She'd mourned him and ached for him, and what, he'd been off being some prince?

Because that's what scared her the most. That he really was Diego and Diego was in fact the prince of Calandria. The knowledge would rock her world and she didn't know how she was going to recover. Because having the child of a bad boy turned art thief was one thing, but having the child of an heir to a throne was quite another.

He pulled his passport out of his suit jacket and handed it to her. She glanced at the cover, then nodded at Grandma Tessa. "Let her read it."

Mia told herself she didn't want to look at it because she needed to keep her attention on Diego...or possibly Prince Rafael of Calandria. But in truth, she didn't want to see the words printed there.

Tessa opened the passport. Grammy M moved in close and stared over her shoulder.

"A very flattering picture," Grammy M said, smiling at him.

"Thank you."

He was all graciousness and confidence, and he didn't seem the least bit intimidated by the poker in Mia's hand, which made her want to bonk him with it.

Grandma Tessa stared at the print on the page, then looked at Mia. "It says he's the prince. Crown Prince Rafael of Calandria. *Prince* is even listed as his occupation."

Oh God. This couldn't be good.

"Of course it could be a fake," Tessa said cheerfully. "People do it all the time. A couple of hundred bucks and you have a new passport."

Definitely too much TV, Mia thought.

"A prince," Grammy M said, eyeing Rafael. "There'll be a castle, then, with the title?"

He nodded. "Of course. We're also very rich."

Grammy M beamed at Mia. "So, maybe you'll be inviting your friend the prince to breakfast?"

Mia wanted to scream. "He broke in to my *bedroom*. We don't know who he really is. The last time I saw him, he was dead, and you want to invite him to breakfast?"

Grammy M slipped her arm through Diego's...or Rafael's...and walked him to the door. "So, how will you be taking your coffee?"

Mia watched them go, then dropped the poker to the floor. "Somebody shoot me now. I know matchmaking is a time-honored Marcelli tradition, but could we please first find out the man in question isn't an ax murderer?"

Grandma Tessa handed her the passport. "You're the one who'd know that. Is he who he says he is?"

Mia stared at the picture. So much the same and yet so much different, she thought. Was it possible Diego hadn't died that night? That he was really the Crown Prince of Calandria?

"I don't know," she admitted. "I don't know anything."

Grandma Tessa moved to the door. "He was supposed to have been killed five years ago?"

Mia nodded.

"So he's Danny's father."

She nodded again.

"Then this is going to be interesting...."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lawrence Gregory:

This The Marcelli Princess (The Marcelli Sisters of Pleasure Road, Book 5) book is not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is actually information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. This specific The Marcelli Princess (The Marcelli Sisters of Pleasure Road, Book 5) without we realize teach the one who looking at it become critical in imagining and analyzing. Don't become worry The Marcelli Princess (The Marcelli Sisters of Pleasure Road, Book 5) can bring if you are and not make your bag space or bookshelves' become full because you can have it with your lovely laptop even cell phone. This The Marcelli Princess (The Marcelli Sisters of Pleasure Road, Book 5) having good arrangement in word along with layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

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