



The Ice Prince (Orsini Brides Book 5)

By Sandra Marton

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Except Anna Orsini. She isn't any ordinary adversary, she's a high-flying, straight-talking lawyer in a no-nonsense suit and killer stilettos—conflicting signals that perplex, frustrate and attract Draco all at the same time....

While they're at odds in business, in the bedroom Draco's desire for Anna has the power to melt his defenses. The temptation to play with fire is overwhelming....

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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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The first time he noticed her was in the Air Italy VIP lounge.

Noticed? Later, that would strike him as a bad joke. How could he not have noticed her?

The fact was, she burst into his life with all the subtlety of a lit string of firecrackers. The only difference? Firecrackers would have been less dangerous.

Draco was sitting in a leather chair near the windows, doing his best imitation of a man reading through a file on his laptop when the truth was he was too sleep-deprived, too jet-lagged, too wound up to do more than try to focus his eyes on the screen.

As if all that weren't enough, he had one hell of a headache.

Six hours from Maui to Los Angeles. A two-hour layover there, followed by six hours more to New York and now another two-hour layover that was stretching toward three.

He couldn't imagine anyone who would be happy at such an endless trip, but for a man accustomed to flying in his own luxurious 737, the journey was rapidly becoming intolerable.

Circumstances had given him no choice.

His plane was down for scheduled maintenance, and with the short notice he'd had of the urgent need to return to Rome, there'd been no time to make other arrangements.

Not even Draco Valenti—*Prince* Draco Marcellus Valenti, because he was certain his ever-efficient PA had resorted to the use of his full, if foolish, title in her attempts to make more suitable arrangements—could come up with a rented aircraft fit for intercontinental flight at the last minute.

He had flown coach from Maui to L.A., packed in a center seat between a man who oozed over the armrest that barely separated them and an obscenely cheerful middle-aged woman who had talked nonstop as they flew over the Pacific. Draco had gone from polite *mmms* and *uh-huhs* to silence, but that had not stopped her from telling him her life story.

He had done better on the cross-country flight to Kennedy Airport, managing to snag a suddenly available first-class seat, but again the person next to him had wanted to talk, and not even Draco's stony silence had shut him up.

For this last leg of his journey, the almost four thousand miles that would finally take him home, he had at the last minute gone to the gate and, miracle of miracles, snagged two first-class seats—one for himself, the

other to ensure he would make the trip alone.

Then he'd headed here, to the lounge, comforted by the hope that he might be able to nap, to calm down, if nothing else, before the confrontation that lay ahead.

It would not be easy, but nothing would be gained by losing control. If life had taught him one great lesson, that was it. And just as he was silently repeating that mantra, trying to focus on ways to contain the anger inside him, the door to the all but empty first-class lounge swung open so hard it banged against the wall.

Cristo!

Just what he needed, he thought grimly as the pain in his temple jumped a notch.

Glowering, he looked up. And saw the woman. He disliked her on sight.

At first glance, she was attractive. Tall. Slender. Blond hair. But there was more to see and judge than that.

She wore a dark gray suit, Armani or some similar label. Her hair was pulled back in a low, no-nonsense ponytail. A carry-on the size of a small trunk dangled from one shoulder, a bulging briefcase from the other.

And then there were the shoes.

Black pumps. Practical enough—except for the spiked, sky-high heels.

Draco's eyes narrowed.

He'd seen the combination endless times before. The severe hairstyle. The businesslike suit. And then the stilettos. It was a look favored by women who wanted all the benefits of being female while demanding they be treated like men.

Typical. And if that was a sexist opinion, so be it.

He watched as her gaze swept across the lounge. There were only three people in it at this late hour. An elderly couple, seated on a small sofa, their heads drooping, and him. Her eyes moved over the sleeping couple. Found him.

And held.

An unreadable expression crossed her face. It was, he had to admit, a good face. Wide set eyes. High cheekbones. A full mouth and a determined chin. He waited; he had the feeling she was about to say something...and then she looked away and he thought, *Bene*.

He was not in the mood for making small talk; he was not in the mood for being hit on by a woman. He was not in the mood for any damned thing except being left alone, returning to Rome and dealing with the potential mess that threatened him there, and he turned his attention back to his computer as her heels tapped across the marble floor to the momentarily deserted reception desk.

"Hello?" Impatience colored her voice. "Hello?" she said again. "Is anyone here?"

Draco lifted his head. Wonderful. She was not just impatient but irritable, and she was peering over the desk as if she hoped to find someone crouched behind it.

"Damn," she said, and Draco's lips thinned with distaste.

Impatient. Irritable. And American. The bearing, the voice, the *me-uberalles* attitude—she might as well have had her passport plastered to her forehead. He dealt with Americans all the time—his main offices were in San Francisco—and while he admired the forthrightness of the men, he disliked the lack of femininity in some of the women.

They tended to be good-looking, all right, but he liked his women warm. Soft. Completely female. Like his current mistress.

"Draco," she'd breathed last night after he'd joined her in the shower of the beachfront mansion he'd rented on Maui, lifted her into his arms and taken her while the water beat down on them both. "Oh, Draco, I just adore a man who takes charge."

No one would ever take charge of the woman at the reception desk, now tapping one stiletto-clad foot with annoyance, but then, what man would be fool enough to want to try?

As if she'd read his thoughts, she swung around and stared around the room again.

Stared at him.

It lasted only a couple of seconds, not as long as when they'd made eye contact before, but the look she gave him was intense.

So intense that, despite himself, he felt a stir of interest. "So sorry to have kept you waiting," a breathless voice said.

It was the lounge hostess, hurrying toward the reception desk. "How may I help you, miss?"

The American turned toward the clerk. "I have a serious problem," Draco heard her say, and then she lowered her voice, leaned toward the other woman and began what was clearly a rushed speech.

Draco let out a breath and dropped his eyes to his computer screen. That he should, even for a heartbeat, have responded to the woman only proved how jet-lagged he was.

And he had to be in full gear by the time he reached Rome and the situation that awaited him.

He was accustomed to dealing with difficult situations. In fact, he enjoyed resolving them.

But this one threatened to turn into a public mess, and he did not countenance public anythings, much to the media's chagrin. He did not like publicity and never sought it.

He had built a financial empire from the ruins of the one his father and grandfather and countless great-great-grandfathers had systematically plundered and ultimately almost destroyed over the course of five centuries.

And he had done it alone.

No stockholders. No outsiders. Not just in his financial existence. In his world. His very private world. Life's great lesson *numero due*. Trusting others was for fools.

That was why he'd left Maui after a middle-of-the-night call from his PA had dragged him out of a warm bed made even warmer by the lush, naked body of his mistress.

Draco had listened. And listened. Then he'd cursed, risen from the bed and paced out the bedroom door, onto the moon-kissed sand.

"Fax me the letter," he'd snapped. "And everything we have in that damned file."

His PA had obliged. Dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, Draco had read through it all until the pink light of dawn glittered on the sea.

By then he'd known what he had to do. Give up the cooling trade winds of Hawaii for the oppressive summer heat of Rome, and a confrontation with the representative of a man and a way of life he despised.

The worst of it was that he'd thought he'd finished with this weeks ago. That initial ridiculous letter from someone named Cesare Orsini. Another letter, when he ignored the first, followed by a third, at which point he'd marched into the office of one of his assistants.

"I want everything you can find on an American named Cesare Orsini," he'd ordered.

The information had come quickly.

Cesare Orsini had been born in Sicily. He had immigrated to America more than half a century ago with his wife; he had become an American citizen.

And he had repaid the generosity of his adopted homeland by becoming a hoodlum, a mobster, a gangster with nothing to recommend him except money, muscle and now a determination to acquire something that had, for centuries, belonged to the House of Valenti and now to him, Prince Draco Marcellus Valenti, of Sicily and Rome.

That ridiculous title.

Draco didn't often use it or even think it. He found it officious, even foolish in today's world. But, just as his PA would have resorted to using it in her search for a way to get him from Hawaii to Italy, he had deliberately used it in his reply to the American don, couching his letter in cool, formal tones but absolutely permitting the truth—*Do you know who you're dealing with? Get the hell off my back, old man*—to shine through.

So much for that, Draco had thought. Wrong.

The don had just countered with a threat.

Not a physical one. Too bad. Draco, whose early years had not been spent in royal privilege, would have welcomed dealing with that.

Orsini's threat had been more cunning.

I am sending my representative to meet with you, Your Highness, he had written. Should you and my lawyer fail to reach a compromise, I see no recourse other ...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rose Miller:

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