



Roccanti's Marriage Revenge (Marriage by Command)

By Lynne Graham

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Zara Blake is shattered by the public exposé of the night she risked everything—and lost. She betrayed her father, and his plans for her marriage, for one chance at passion. But that's nothing compared to the headline that will come in nine months' time!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lynne Graham lives in Northern Ireland and has been a keen romance reader since her teens. Happily married, Lynne has five children. Her eldest is her only natural child. Her other children, who are every bit as dear to her heart, are adopted. The family has a variety of pets, and Lynne loves gardening, cooking, collecting allsorts and is crazy about every aspect of Christmas.

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Vitale Roccanti was a banker descended from a very old and aristocratic European family. Opening the private investigator's file on his desk, he studied the photograph of four people seated at a dining table. The Greek billionaire, Sergios Demonides, was entertaining Monty Blake, the British owner of the Royale hotel chain, his highly ornamental wife, ingrid and their daughter, Zara.

Zara, nicknamed Tinkerbell by the media for her celebrity status, her silver-gilt-coloured hair and fairy-like proportions, wore what appeared to be an engagement ring. Evidently the rumours of a buyout anchored by a family alliance were true. Most probably Demonides' loathing for publicity lay behind the lack of an official announcement but it certainly did look as though a marriage was on the cards.

Vitale, renowned for his shrewd brain and ruthless pursuit of profit, frowned. His lean, darkly handsome face hardened, his firm mouth compressing. His dark gaze flared gold with angry bitterness because it could only sicken him to see Monty Blake still smiling and at the top of his game. For a fleeting instant he allowed himself to recall the loving sister who had drowned when he was thirteen years old and his stomach clenched at the recollection of the savage loss that had left him alone in an inhospitable world. His sister had been the only person who had ever truly loved him, and the moment that he had worked towards for the better part of twenty years had finally arrived, for Blake looked to be on the brink of his greatest ever triumph. If Vitale waited any longer his prey might well become untouchable as the father-in-law of so powerful a man as Sergios Demonides. Yet how had Blake contrived to catch a fish as big as Demonides in his net? Apart from the little known fact that the Royale hotel chain had once belonged to Demonides' grandfather, what was the connection?

Were the oft-publicised charms of Tinkerbell, whose brain was said to be as lightweight as her body, the only source of Blake's unexpected good fortune? Was she truly the sole attraction? Vitale had never let a woman come between him and his wits and would have assumed that Demonides had equal common sense. His mouth curled with derision. If he ensured that the engagement was broken the business deal might well go belly up as well and he would bring down Monty Blake, who desperately needed a buyer.

Vitale had never dreamt that he would have to get personal or indeed so unpleasantly close to his quarry to gain the revenge that his very soul craved for closure, but he remained convinced that Monty Blake's cruelty demanded an equal response. Should not the punishment be made to fit the crime? This was not the time to be fastidious, he reflected harshly. He could not afford to respect such boundaries. No, he only had one option: he would have to play dirty to punish the man who had abandoned his sister and her unborn child to their wretched fate.

A man who had always enjoyed enormous success with women, Vitale studied his prey, Tinkerbell. His shapely mouth quirked. In his opinion she fell easily into the acceptable damage category. And wasn't

suffering supposed to form character? Huge blue eyes wide in her heart shaped face, Blake's daughter was undeniably beautiful, but she also looked as shallow as a puddle and was anything but a blushing virgin with tender feelings. Undoubtedly she would regret the loss of so wealthy a catch as Demonides but Vitale imagined that, like her glossy mother, she had the hide of a rhinoceros and the heart of a stone and would bounce back very quickly from the disappointment. And if he left her a little wiser, that would surely only be to her advantage...

'I can't believe you've agreed to marry Sergios Demonides,' Bee confessed, her green eyes bright with concern as she studied the younger woman.

Although Bee was only marginally taller than her diminutive half sibling, and the two women had the same father, Bee was built on very different lines. Zara looked delicate enough to blow away in a strong breeze but Bee had inherited her Spanish mother's heavy fall of dark brown hair and olive-tinted skin and she had substantial curves. Bee was the child of Monty Blake's first marriage, which had ended in divorce, but she and Zara were close. Monty had a third daughter called Tawny, the result of an extra-marital affair. Neither girl knew their youngest sister very well because Tawny's mother was very bitter about the way their father had treated her.

'Why wouldn't I have?' Zara shrugged a narrow shoulder, striving for a show of composure. She was very fond of Bee and she didn't want the other woman worrying about her, so she opted for a deliberately careless response. 'I'm tired of being single and I like kids—'

'How can you be tired of being single? You're only twenty-two and it's not as if you're in love with Demonides!' Bee protested, scanning her sibling's flawless face in disbelief.

'Well...er—'

'You can't love him—you hardly *know* him, for goodness' sake!' Bee exclaimed, quick to take advantage of Zara's hesitation. Although she had met Sergios Demonides only once, her shrewd powers of observation, followed up by some careful Internet research on the Greek tycoon, had warned her that he was altogether too tough a proposition for her tenderhearted sister. Demonides had a very bad reputation with women and he was equally renowned for his cold and calculating nature.

Zara lifted her chin. 'It depends what you want out of marriage and all Sergios wants is someone to raise the children that have been left to his care—'

Bee frowned at that explanation. 'His cousin's three kids?'

Zara nodded. Several months earlier Sergios' cousin and his wife had been killed in a car crash and Sergios had become their children's legal guardian. Her future husband was a forceful, sardonic and distinctly intimidating shipping magnate, who travelled a great deal and worked very long hours. If she was honest, and there were very few people in Zara's life whom she dared to be honest with, she had been considerably less intimidated by Sergios once he had confessed that the only reason he wanted a wife was to acquire a mother for the three orphans in his home. That was a role that Zara felt she could comfortably cope with.

The children, ranging in age from a six-month-old baby to a three-year-old, were currently being raised almost entirely by his staff. Apparently the children had not settled well in his household. Sergios might be a very rich and powerful man but his concern for the children had impressed her. The product of a dysfunctional background himself, Sergios wanted to do what was best for those children but he just didn't know how and he was convinced that a woman would succeed where he had failed.

For her own part, Zara was desperately keen to do something that would finally make her parents proud of her. Her twin Tom's tragic death at the tender age of twenty had ripped a huge hole in her family. Zara had adored her brother. She had never resented the fact that Tom was their parents' favourite, indeed had often been grateful that Tom's academic successes had taken parental attention away from her wounding failures. Zara had left school halfway through her A-levels because she was struggling to cope, while Tom had been studying for a business degree at university and planning to join their father in the family hotel business when he crashed his sports car, dying instantly.

Sadly for all of them, her charismatic and successful brother had been everything her parents had ever wanted and needed in a child, and since his death grief had made her father's dangerous temper rage out of control more often. If in some way Zara was able to compensate her parents for Tom's loss and her survival she was eager to do it. After all she had spent her life striving for parental approval without ever winning it. When Tom had died she had wondered why fate chose him rather than her as a sacrifice. Tom had often urged her to make more of her life, insisting that she shouldn't allow their father's low opinion of her abilities to influence her so much. On the day of Tom's funeral she had promised herself that in honour of her brother's memory she would in the future make the most of every opportunity and work towards making her parents happy again. And it was a sad fact that Zara's entire education had been geared towards being the perfect wife for a wealthy man and that the only way she would ever really please her parents would be by marrying a rich high-achiever.

The children in Sergios' London home had touched her heart. Once she had been an unhappy child so she knew something of how they felt. Looking into those sad little faces, she had felt that finally she could make a big difference in someone else's life. Sergios might not personally need her, but those children genuinely *did* and she was convinced that she could make a success of her role as a mother. That was something she could do, something she could shine at and that meant a lot to Zara.

What was more, when she had agreed to marry Sergios, her father had looked at her with pride for the first time in her life. She would never forget that moment or the glow of warmth, acceptance and happiness she had felt. Her father had smiled at her and patted her shoulder in an unprecedented gesture of affection. 'Well done,' he had said, and she would not have exchanged that precious moment of praise for a million pounds. Zara was also convinced that marriage to Sergios would give her freedom, which she had never known. Freedom primarily from her father, whose temper she had learned to fear, but also freedom from the oppressive expectations of her perfectly groomed, socially ambitious mother, freedom from the boring repetition of days spent shopping and socialising with the right people in the right places, freedom from the egotistical men relentlessly targeti...

Users Review

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