

The Prince She Had to Marry (The Bravo Royales Book 2)

By Christine Rimmer

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Alex had agreed to make an effort for the sake of the baby, even though letting the lovely Lili close was a threat to the barriers he'd long struggled to maintain. But the future of the throne—and his royal honor—was at stake. And when he and Lili posed as happy newlyweds for the paparazzi, he found himself wishing that their marriage could be for real after all….

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Editorial Review

About the Author
A USA TODAY- bestselling author, Christine Rimmer has written over eighty contemporary romances for Harlequin Books. Christine has won the Romantic Times BOOKreviews Reviewers Choice Award and has been nominated six times for the RITA Award. She lives in Oregon with her family.

Visit Christine at http://www.christinerimmer.com.

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"Which of your sons has impregnated my virgin daughter?" King Leo demanded so loud that the words seemed to bounce off the damask-covered walls. He swept the room with a burning, accusatory glance.

Liliana, Princess of Alagonia and also the formerly virgin daughter in question, cringed at her spot near the tall, elegantly carved, gold-trimmed double doors. You could have heard the proverbial pin drop.

The Bravo-Calabretti family, surprised during their morning meal, did not say a word. They sat perfectly still in the beautiful antique chairs around the large pedestal table. They stared, unmoving, even the children—eyes tracking from Leo to Lili and then back to her furious father again.

They were all there, too, in the breakfast room of Her Sovereign Highness's private apartment at the Prince's Palace of Montedoro. Every one of them: HSH Adrienne and her prince consort, Evan, and their four sons and five daughters.

Also present were the heir apparent's two young children and the new wife and son of the second-born prince, Rule.

King Leo, his face red as the heart of Montedoran orange, started shouting again. "Who is the culprit? Who has dishonored my one and only child?"

Lili longed simply to sink through the inlaid marble floor, to crawl under the lush, blue-accented Savonnerie rug. Dear, sweet Lord in heaven. Did it get any worse than this? She was afraid it just might. She had tried her very best to keep her father from finding out about the baby—at least not until she'd had a chance to talk to the exasperating prince she'd made the terrible mistake of having sex with.

But she'd received no answer to the letter she'd sent him. He had not returned her two furtive calls. And before she could decide what her next move should be, her father had found out.

Lili was an only child and her father loved her absolutely. And somehow, he always knew when something was bothering her. He'd been after her for weeks to tell him what the matter was. He'd kept insisting that she was looking pale, that she never smiled anymore. She had repeatedly denied there was anything wrong.

And then, last night: disaster at dinner. It was the lamb that did it. Just the smell of it had her running from the table.

Her father had jumped up and come after her. He barreled into her apartment right behind her and even followed her all the way to the toilet, where he knelt on the floor beside her and held her head while she was

repeatedly sick. He was beside himself with worry, certain she was desperately ill, that she must be knocking at death's door.

As soon as she finished ejecting the meager contents of her stomach, she had tried to soothe him, tried to reassure him that it was nothing. A little indigestion, a touch of the flu….

But he wouldn't be soothed. He questioned the servants. They loved her and were loyal to her, every one of them. They all tried to protect her, to claim they knew nothing. But they did know. The servants always do. And her father could be frightening, with his deep, commanding voice, his blustery manner and imaginative, if essentially baseless, threats.

In the end, a young chambermaid had broken down in tears and revealed the truth. "Sir, I'm so sorry, Sir. Her Highness is…with child."

At which point her father hit the ceiling. For half the night, he'd kept after Lili, demanding to know the name of the scurvy dog who had taken advantage of her. Lili refused to tell him.

And her father took action. He was positive it had to be one of the Bravo-Calabretti princes.

Unfortunately, he happened to be right—not that she'd admitted it. She hadn't. In fact, she had not so much as spoken a single word to His Majesty since well before midnight.

At two in the morning, he'd herded her aboard the royal jet. They took off for the airport at Nice. Alagonia was an island state off the coast of Spain. Montedoro, a short drive from Nice, claimed a particularly scenic slice of the glorious Cote d'Azur. The direct flight took just over five hours, which Lili had spent in her sleeping compartment with the door firmly shut against her father and his fulminating glances, his dire accusations and his neverending insistence that she give him the name of the "low-born son of a dog" who had "used and abused" her. She'd tried to sleep but couldn't.

And now, as she trembled in her spot near the breakfast-room door, Lili tried desperately not to further disgrace herself—no! She would not be sick now. Not here, in front of her red-faced, wild-eyed father and all those staring Bravo-Calabretti princes.

And while she was busy not letting herself throw up, she also took great care not to look directly in the face of the one who'd relieved her of her virginity. The one who had refused to answer her letter or return her calls. Maybe now he would finally condescend to get in touch with her.

Even though she didn't dare meet his eyes for fear she would give him away, she silently prayed he would keep his mouth shut—for now. Let her father get nowhere with his histrionics. Eventually the king would wind down. Then she and the father of her child could discuss the situation in private, just the two of them, as they should have done long before now.

"I demand that the culprit stand and face me," her father blustered on. "I demand satisfaction and I demand it immediately!"

Yet more dead silence in the breakfast room.

And then, slowly, every Bravo-Calabretti head but the youngest ones swiveled in Prince Damien's direction. Lili wasn't particularly surprised. Damien was the family jet-setter, famous with the ladies. She knew what they all must be thinking: Who else could it be but Damien? Surely not Rule. Yes, Rule had been expected to propose to Lili for years, but they all knew he thought of her like a sister, that he'd never made any kind of

advances toward her. And he was now happily married to the brilliant American, Sydney O'Shea, whom Lili truly admired.

Well, and it *hadn't* been Rule. It wasn't Damien either. But only two people in the room knew that.

King Leo didn't miss the way everyone glanced in Damien's direction. "Aha," he crowed hotly. "So, then. It's *you*, Damien. I suspected it might be. Stand," he commanded, whipping out the ceremonial scimitar he'd strapped on when they'd left the royal jet. How utterly mortifying. Leave it to her father to bring a scimitar. He swung the blade back and forth. It sang through the air of the too-quiet room. And then he assumed a fighting stance, the long, curving sword held high. "Stand and face me, you offal-eating swine."

Beyond humiliated now, Lili stifled a moan of pure misery. Her father was a fair man and a good ruler—except when his fury was roused. "Papa," she pleaded, "I beg you. This is not about you. This is between me and the father of my child. I want you to stop this. Now."

Her father ignored her.

Damien started to stand. Leo lunged forward and Lili opened her mouth to admit that Damien was not the man.

But before she made a sound, Damien's twin, Alexander, pushed back his chair and rose. "Sir, you have it wrong. Damien is innocent. I am the guilty one." Alex stood tall, his powerful shoulders drawn back, his haunted eyes level, frighteningly blank.

Lili clapped her hand over her mouth and swallowed bile. Yes, she understood that Alex had no choice but to reveal himself at that point. He couldn't just sit there and allow her father to take his ridiculous scimitar to poor Damian, who for once was *not* guilty of seducing someone he shouldn't have.

But still…dear Holy Virgin, what now?

Everyone was gaping in shock.

They couldn't believe that Alex was the one, which didn't surprise Lili. She could hardly believe it herself—and she'd been there when it happened. They all knew that she'd always despised Alex, *and* that he felt the same way about her. Plus, well, Alex wasn't interested in women anyway. Not even in women he liked and respected. Not anymore. Not since whatever unspeakable horrors had befallen him in Afghanistan.

And yet.

The two of them did have sex together. Just once, in the second week of April. Once. That was all it had taken to plant a new life inside her, to change her world forever.

Alex. She'd lost her virginity to Alex. She still had trouble believing she'd done that. Because, honestly, how *could* she?

Her father seemed as shocked as the rest of them. "Alexander?" he asked, his voice suddenly without force, utterly disbelieving.

But then his fury returned full force. With a bloodcurdling shout, he raised his sword again and went for Alex—Alex, who didn't so much as flinch, but simply stood there, apparently ready to take whatever punishment her father saw fit to inflict upon him.

"Stop!" Lili shouted.

Her father didn't even break stride. She rushed forward to intercept him.

But Her Sovereign Highness Adrienne, Lili's dear friend and Alex's mother, was faster.

Montedoro's monarch rose lightly to her feet. She had a truly calm, almost-pleased expression on her legendary face. As though she couldn't have been more delighted to learn that her dark and damaged son had actually lurched back to life long enough to impregnate Lili, whom everyone knew was like another daughter to her.

Adrienne planted her noble person between the enraged king and her third-born son. Her smile turned even sweeter as she faced down Lili's father. "Leo," she said gently in warm, melodious tones. "I'm so glad you've come. And I think that now would be the perfect opportunity to discuss the wedding, don't you?"

Chapter Two

There were top secret meetings all that day. Alexander had work he should have been doing. But he put his work aside to be there while negotiations for his marriage to Lili were carried through.

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