



One Night Heir (By His Royal Decree Book 1)

By Lucy Monroe

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Only a royal wedding...

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...can avert this royal scandal!

Now he faces the biggest diplomatic crisis of his life. Against all odds, Gillian Harris has become pregnant. Maks's royal reserve masks the heart of a fierce Cossack warrior—one who is not above using their mutual passion to convince a hurt, wary Gillian that she must be his queen!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

USA Today Bestseller Lucy Monroe finds inspiration for her stories everywhere as she is an avid people-watcher. She has published more than fifty books in several subgenres of romance and when she's not writing, Lucy likes to read. She's an unashamed book geek, but loves movies and the theatre too. She adores her family and truly enjoys hearing from her readers! Visit her website at: <http://lucymonroe.com>

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Fury riding him like an angry stallion, Crown Prince Maksim of Volyarus let loose with a punch-cross-hook kickboxing combo against his cousin and sparring partner.

Demyan blocked, and the sound of flesh hitting pads mixed with his grunt of surprise. "Something the matter, your highness?"

Maks hated when his cousin, older by four years and raised as a brother with Maks in their family's palace, referred to him by his title.

Demyan was well aware, but the older man liked pushing buttons, especially during their workout sessions. He said it made the sparring more intense.

Today would have been sufficiently punishing without the added irritation. Not that Maks warned Demyan of that. His cousin deserved what he got.

"Nothing wiping the smug look off your face won't take care of." Maks danced back before driving forward with another fast-paced, grueling combo.

Well-matched in stature and strength, they both kept their six-feet-four-inch frames in top physical condition.

"I thought tonight was the big night with Gillian," Demyan said, scrambling in a way he rarely did during their sessions. "Don't tell me you think she's going to turn you down?"

"If I were going to ask, she'd say yes." And a day ago that certainty had given Maks a great deal of pleasure.

Now, it just taunted him with what he couldn't have. Namely, Gillian.

"So, what is the problem?" Demyan demanded as he went on the offensive, forcing Maks to defend against a barrage of punches and kicks.

"Her medical tests came back."

"She's not sick, is she?" Demyan asked, sounding sincerely concerned.

Coming from a man with a reputation for cold ruthlessness, it would have shocked anyone else.

But Maks knew how much Demyan cared about their family. And for the last eight months, the beautiful, sweet Gillian had been moving closer and closer to joining that group.

"She's perfectly fine." If you didn't count poorly functioning ovaries. "Now."

"What does that mean?"

"She had appendicitis when she was sixteen."

"That was ten years ago, what bearing does it have on her health now?"

"Fallopian tubes."

Demyan stopped and stared at Maks in confusion.

"What?"

In no mood to give his cousin a break, Maks took advantage of the other man's inattention and knocked him on his ass with a well-timed kick.

Demyan jumped to his feet, but he didn't come back for more like Maks expected. "Knock it off and explain what the hell appendicitis as a teenager has to do with an adult woman's fallopian tubes."

Demyan was no idiot. He knew Maks's interest in Gillian's reproductive system was of paramount importance to the House of Yurkovich, the royal family of Volyarus.

"She has a poorly functioning reproductive system." Maks adjusted his thin sparring gloves. "There is less than a thirty percent chance of pregnancy."

A lot less by some estimations, slightly more by others, according the specialist Maks had consulted.

Demyan shoved hair the same dark color as Maks's own off his forehead. "With fertility treatment?"

"I have no intention of becoming the next father of sextuplets."

"Don't be an ass."

"I'm not. You know I cannot marry a woman who won't be able to produce the next heir plus a spare."

Demyan didn't reply immediately. They were both too personally aware of the costs associated with those issues.

"You aren't your father. You don't have to marry a woman you don't love in order to provide an heir."

"I have no intention of doing so. Neither will I marry a woman I like whose only hope of providing that child would be via often painful and not always successful fertility treatments."

"You could adopt."

"Like my parents adopted you?"

"They didn't formally adopt me. I am still a Za-retsky. It was never your father's intention that I inherit the

throne."

"You were just his spare," Maks muttered with some bitterness.

Demyan shrugged. "Duty is duty."

"And my duty precludes asking Gillian Harris to marry me." His personal sense of honor also dictated he break things off with her as soon as possible.

"You don't love her?" Demyan asked with only mild curiosity.

"You know better."

"Love only leads to pain," Demyan quoted one of Maks's mother's favorite refrains.

Maks added the rest. "And a compromise on duty."

Both men had reason to believe it, too.

"What are you going to do?" Demyan asked, dropping back into a sparring stance.

Maks executed a simple forward jab-left hook combo. "What do you think?"

"I'll miss her."

Maks didn't doubt it. One of the reasons he'd decided to ask Gillian to marry him was that despite her mostly small-town upbringing, she got along surprisingly well with his family and successfully navigated social situations many would find overwhelming.

The daughter of a renowned world news correspondent, Gillian had been attending events with the world's richest and most powerful since a young age.

Demyan blocked Maks's kick and returned one of his own. "Are you going to tell her tonight?"

"I may not need to." The lovely blue-eyed blonde would have gotten a copy of the results of her latest physical.

Gillian would know about the reasons behind her irregular menses now as well. She already knew the responsibilities associated with his position. She should be expecting the dissolution of their relationship.

A more practical woman than most, he had hopes there would be no awkward "breakup" scene.

"Yes, Nana, I think tonight's the night," Gillian said into the phone mashed to her ear with her shoulder as she hopped around the room trying to get her shoes on.

"Has he told you he loved you yet?" Evelyn Harris, Gillian's nana and the woman who had raised her, asked.

"No."

"Your grandfather has told me every night before we go to sleep for the last forty-eight years that he loves me."

"I know, Nana." But Maks was different.

He held his emotions in check like it was a royal imperative, and ever the dutiful prince, he obeyed. They came out when he was making love, though. After a fashion.

Maks made love with the single-minded intensity of a man who was thinking of nothing else but pleasing and getting lost in the woman who shared his bed.

For the past seven months, that woman had been Gillian.

They'd dated a month before he took her to bed the first time. She'd found that odd at the time, considering his reputation, but later she'd realized that, as unbelievable as it might seem, Maks was looking for more from her than a casual bed partner.

And while she'd been more thrilled than shocked, she'd been stunned all the same.

She didn't belong in his circle. She was not rich, famous, or powerful, but Gillian's father still liked to see her when he was in town. That inevitably meant going to some function or other on his arm. He couldn't dedicate time simply to visiting her, so he included Gillian in his schedule.

As the famous news correspondent's unremarkable daughter, Gillian had attended more than her fair share of diplomatic and high society events.

No one had been more shocked than she when it turned out that Crown Prince Maksim Yurkovich of Volyarus seemed to *like* unremarkable. Several comments made by him, and a couple by his mother on the few occasions Gillian had met the queen, had made it clear that royalty did not look for notoriety when choosing a mate.

Though regardless, she would have thought Maks would be looking for someone with more personal cache than Gillian to bring into the royal family. Apparently Volyarussians did not have the same requirements for pedigree in a mate than other royal families of the world.

And there couldn't be anyone less notorious than the small-town girl from Alaska who made her living as what her father termed a "chocolate-box" photographer.

There was nothing objectionable, or even questionable in Gillian's past. Her parents hadn't stayed together and neither had been interested in raising her, but they'd entered into a short businesslike marriage prior to her birth and hadn't filed for divorce until a year after.

"I may as well hang up now, your mind is clearly in the clouds again, child," Nana said over the phone line.

Gillian shoved her blond hair behind her ear and adjusted the phone. "I'm sorry, Nana. I didn't mean to—"

"I know. You get to thinking about Maks and the rest of your brain shuts off, especially the part attached to your ears."

"It's not that bad."

Her grandmother's snort said the older woman did not agree. "You make that boy tell you that he loves you before you agree to be his wife."

"He's hardly a boy, Nana." Gillian had made the same protest before, but to little effect.

"I'm seventy-five years old, Gillian. He's a boy to me."

"Some people never say those words," Gillian pointed out, returning to the subject she knew her grandmother considered most important.

"Some people have less sense than God gave a gnat then."

"Rich doesn't say it, but he loves me." Even as she said the words, Gillian knew she wasn't actually certain that they were *true*.

Her father wasn't an affectionate or demonstrative man. Rich Harris had made little more than a moderate effort to be part of her life, but he'd also been the one to make sure she had two people to raise her who loved and cared for her. The two dear people who had raised him.

"Your daddy is an idiot, no matter what those Pulitzer Prize people say."

Gillian laughed, knowing her grandmother didn't mean the words. Nana was hugely proud of her world famous son and still held out the hope that one day he would take on the role of Gillian's father.

That ship had sailed a long time ago, but Gillian would never say so to the older woman.

She owed too much to Nana to hurt her in any way. "Don't you let him hear you say that. He'll take back the motor home."

"I'd like to see him try. I still have a wooden spoon and I'm not afraid to use it."

Gillian couldn't help more laughter at that. Nana'd had the same fabled wooden spoon all the years of her growing up, too, but her backside had never felt the flat side of it.

"I swear, I don't know what makes that boy of mine think like he does."

"He's fine, Nana. His dreams didn't include having a family. That doesn't make him bad."

"Well, he has a daughter, whether he dreamed you up or not."

"I know." She'd spent her whole life knowing that while she had not been precisely wanted, both her parents had given her the gift of life and that was as far as the sacrifice was ever going to go.

"I don't like to see you settling," Nana said in that tone Gillian hated.

It was the I-worry-about-you-child-I-really-do tone and it came five minutes before Nana decided she needed to give up whatever adventure she and Papa were on to fly back to Seattle and check in on her

granddaughter.

"I'm fine, Nana. Better than fine." She was on the verge of getting engaged to the man she loved with her whole heart. "I don't need the words."

And she didn't. She needed the actions. She needed Maks to put her first, to treat her like she mattered and he did that. His life was both high-profile and extremely busy, but Maks didn't cancel dates, he didn't show up late, and he didn't dismiss her interests or her career as a studio photographer.

"Hmmpf."

That sound was almost as concerning as the older woman's tone earlier. It implied that Nana would be having a talk with Maks.

Gillian sighed. The man would have to be strong enough to withstand a talking-to, or ten, if they were going to be married.

"Are you and Papa enjoying Vegas?" she asked, hoping to turn to the topic.

"He lost money at the blackjack tables, but I won on the slots." The glee in her grandmother's tone brought a smile to Gillian's face.

"Is Rich still meeting you two for dinner next week?"

"He hasn't *texted* us to cancel." Nana's lack of fondness for texting came through in the way she said the word.

"Good."

"I suppose we'll have good news to tell him."

"I think so." The doorbell rang. "That's him, I've got to go."

"You call us tomorrow, you hear?"

"Yes, Nana." With news.

Smiling, Gillian rushed to answer the door summons. Her gaze fell on the manila envelope with the results from her latest physical. She hadn't read it yet, but didn't expect anything surprising.

Gillian had her physical yearly, something her father had insisted on since she'd nearly died from appendicitis at the age of sixteen. She chose to see it as proof of affection he never gave voice to.

Maks looked serious and devastatingly attractive in his black Armani suit as Gillian pulled the door open.

She smiled up at all six feet four inches of muscular male towering confidently in her doorway. "You're early."

"And yet you are ready. You are no ordinary woman, Gillian Harris." He didn't return her smile, but his

espresso-brown eyes traveled down her body like a caress.

He always did that, making her feel like all the super models in the world wouldn't take his attention from her decidedly normal blond hair, blue eyes, average height and curves.

She stepped back to let him in. "Nana didn't stand for tardiness."

"And here I believed you were so eager to see me, you could not wait to get dressed," he teased.

She grinned up at him. "That, too."

He lowered his head and kissed her, his lips brushing hers in polite greeting. She returned the kiss, letting her mouth open just slightly because she liked the feel of their breath mingling.

He made an inarticulate sound and deepened the kiss, pulling her body flush to his as he maneuvered them back into her apartment. As so often happened when they kissed, time stopped moving for her and the only thing her consciousness registered was the feel of his lips on hers and his hard body so close.

When he pulled back, they were both breathing a little heavily.

Users Review

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