



Temporarily His Princess (Married by Royal Decree Book 1)

By Olivia Gates



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But Vincenzo's proposal is the last thing Glory expects. His long-ago rejection nearly destroyed her—how can she say yes now, even for show? Yet she has no choice. Becoming Vincenzo's temporary bride will save her family—even if giving in to the prince of Castaldini's passion will surely leave her yearning for more....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

USA TODAY Bestselling author Olivia Gates has published over thirty books in contemporary, action/adventure and paranormal romance. She currently writes exotic, passionate modern-day fairytales for Harlequin Desire and dark, erotic paranormals for Harlequin Nocturne. She loves to hear from readers at oliviagates@gmail.com and connect with them on Facebook [facebook.com/oliviagatesauthor](https://www.facebook.com/oliviagatesauthor), Twitter [@Oliviagates](https://twitter.com/Oliviagates). For her latest news visit oliviagates.com and oliviagates.blogspot.com/

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Vincenzo Arsenio D'Agostino stared at his king and reached the only logical conclusion. The man had lost his mind.

He must have buckled under the pressure of ruling Castaldini while steering his multibillion-dollar business empire. *And* being the most adoring and attentive husband and father who walked the planet. No man could possibly weather all that with his mental faculties intact.

That must be the explanation for what he'd just said.

Ferruccio Selvaggio-D'Agostino—the bastard king, as his opponents called him, relishing it being a literal slur, since Ferruccio *was* an illegitimate D'Agostino—twisted his lips. "Do pick your jaw off the floor, Vincenzo. And no, I'm *not* insane. Get. A. Wife. ASAP."

Dio. He'd said it again.

This time Vincenzo found himself echoing it. "Get a wife." Ferruccio nodded. "ASAP." "Stop *saying* that."

Mockery gleamed in Ferruccio's steel eyes. "You've got only yourself to blame for the rush. I've needed you on this job for *years*, but every time I bring you up to the council they go apoplectic. Even Leandro and Durante wince when your name is mentioned. That playboy image you've been diligently cultivating is now so notorious, even gossip columns are beginning to play it down. And that image won't cut it in the leagues I need you to play in now."

"That image never hurt *you*. Just look where you are today. The king of one of the most conservative kingdoms in the world, with the purest woman on earth as your queen."

Ferruccio shrugged amusedly at his summation. "I was only known as the 'Savage Ironman' in reference to my name and business reputation, and my reported...hazard to women was beyond wildly exaggerated. I had no time for women as I clawed my way up from the gutter to the top, then I was in love with Clarissa for six years before she became mine. But your notoriety as one of the world's premier womanizers won't do when you're Castaldini's emissary to the United Nations. You've got to clean up your act and spray on some respectability to clear away the stench of the scandals that hang around you."

Vincenzo scowled up at him. "If it's depriving you of sleep, I'll tone things down. But I certainly won't 'get a wife' to appease some political fossils, aka your council. And I won't join your, Leandro's and Durante's trio of henpecked husbands. You're all just jealous you can't have my lifestyle."

Ferruccio gave him that look. The one that made Vincenzo feel hollow inside, made him feel like putting his fist through his king's too-well-arranged face. It was the pitying glance of a man who knew bone-deep contentment and found nothing more pathetic than Vincenzo's said lifestyle.

"When you're representing Castaldini, Vincenzo, I want the media only to cover your achievements on behalf of the kingdom, not your conquests' surgical enhancements or tellalls after you exchange them for different models. I don't want the sensitive diplomatic and economic agendas you'll be negotiating to be overshadowed or even derailed by the media circus your lifestyle generates. A wife will show the world that you've changed your ways and will keep the news on the relevant work you'll be doing."

Vincenzo shook his head in disbelief. "*Dio!* When did you become such a stick in the mud, Ferruccio?"

"If you mean when did I become an advocate for marriage and family life, where have you been the last four years? I'm the living, breathing ad for both. And it's time I did you the favor of shoving you onto that path."

"What path? The one to happily ever after? Don't you know that's a mirage most men pursue to no avail? Don't you realize you've beaten impossible odds in finding Clarissa? That not a man in a million will find a fraction of the perfection you share with her?"

Ferruccio pursed his lips. "I don't know about those odds, Vincenzo. Durante found Gabrielle. Leandro found Phoebe."

"Only two more flukes. You all had such terrible things happen during your childhoods and youths, unbelievably good stuff has been happening later in life in compensation. Having lived a blessed life early on, I seem to be destined to have nothing good from now on, to even out the cosmic balance. I will never find anything like the love you all have."

"You're doing everything in your power *not* to find love, or to let it find you—"

Vincenzo interrupted him. "I've only accepted my fate. Love is not in the cards for me."

"And that's *exactly* why I want you to get a wife," Ferruccio interrupted back. "I don't want you to spend your life without the warmth and intimacy, the allegiance and certainty only a good marriage can bring."

"Thanks for the sentiment. But I can't have any of that."

"Because you haven't found love? Love *is* a plus, but not a must. Just look at your parents' example. They started out suitable in theory and turned out right for each other in practice. Pick someone cerebrally and once she's your wife, the qualities that logically appealed to you will weave a bond between you that will strengthen the longer you are together."

"Isn't that an inverted way of doing things? You loved Clarissa first."

"I thought I did, with everything in me. But what I felt for her was a fraction of what I feel for her now. Going by my example, if you start out barely liking your wife, after a year of marriage you'll be ready to die for her."

"Why don't you just acknowledge that you're the luckiest bastard alive, Ferruccio? You may be my king and I may have sworn allegiance to you, but it's not good for your health to keep shoving your happiness in my

face when I already told you there's no chance I'll find anything like it."

"I, too, once believed I had no chance at happiness, either, that emotionally, spiritually, I'd remain vacant, with the one woman I wanted forever out of reach while I was incapable of settling for another."

Was Ferruccio just counterarguing with his own example? Or was he putting two and two together and realizing why Vincenzo was so adamant that he'd never find love?

Suddenly, bitterness and dejection ambushed him as if they'd never subsided.

Ferruccio went on, "But you're pushing forty..."

"I'm thirty-eight!"

"... *and* you've been alone since your parents died two *decades* ago..."

"I'm not alone. I have friends."

"*Whom* you don't have time for and who don't have time for you." Ferruccio raised his hand, aborting Vincenzo's interjection. "Make a new family, Vincenzo. It's the best thing you can do for yourself, and incidentally, for the kingdom."

"Next you'll dictate the wife I should 'get.'"

"If you don't decide on one on your own, *ASAP*, I will."

Vincenzo snorted. "Is that crown you've been wearing for the last four years too tight? Or is your head getting bigger? Or is it the mind-scrambling domestic bliss?"

Ferruccio just smiled that inexorable smile of his.

Knowing the kind of laserlike determination Ferruccio had, Vincenzo knew there was no refusing him.

Might as well give in. To an extent he found acceptable.

He sighed. "If I take the position..."

"*If* implies this is a negotiation, Vincenzo. It isn't."

"*It* will be only for a year."

"It will be until I say."

"A *year*. This isn't up for negotiation, either. There will be no more 'scandals' in the rags, so this wife thing..."

Ferruccio gave him his signature discussionending smile. "Is also nonnegotiable. 'Get a wife' wasn't a suggestion or a request. It's a royal decree."

Ferruccio had eventually buckled. On Vincenzo's one-year proviso. Provided that Vincenzo chose and trained his replacement to *his* satisfaction.

He hadn't budged on the "get a wife" stipulation. He'd even made it official. Vincenzo still couldn't believe what he was looking at. A royal edict ruling that Vincenzo must choose a suitable woman and marry her within two months.

This deserved an official letter from his own corporation telling Ferruccio not to hold his regal breath.

There was no way he'd choose a "suitable woman." Not in two months or two decades. There was no suitable woman for him. Like Ferruccio, he'd been a one-woman man. Unlike him, he'd blown his one shot on an illusion. After six years of being unable to muster the least interest in any other woman he was resigned to his condition.

Though he knew *resigned* wasn't the word for it. Not when every time her memory sank its inky tentacles into his mind, his muscles felt as if they'd snap.

He braced himself until this latest attack passed....

A realization went off in his head like a solar flare.

All these years...he'd been going about it all wrong!

Fighting what he felt with every breath had been the worst thing he could have done. After he'd realized none of it was going away, he should have done the opposite. He should have let it run its course, until it was purged from his system.

But it didn't matter that he hadn't done that before. Now was the perfect time to do it. And to let all those still-seething emotions work to his advantage for once.

A smile tugged at his lips, fueled by what he hadn't felt in six years, what he'd thought he'd never feel again. Excitement. Anticipation. Drive. Challenge.

All he needed now were some updates on Glory to use in this acquisition. He already had enough to make it a hostile takeover, but more leverage wouldn't hurt.

Wouldn't hurt *him*.

Now, *her*—that was a totally different story.

Glory Monaghan stared dazedly at her laptop screen. She couldn't be seeing this. An email from *him*. She drew a shaky hand across numb lips, shock reverberating in her every nerve.

Slow down. Think. It must be an old one....

No. This was new. She'd deleted his old emails. Though she had only two months ago. And by accident, too.

Yep, for six years, those emails had migrated from one computer to another with all of her vital data. She hadn't clicked a mouse to scrub her life clean of his degrading echoes. She hadn't gotten rid of one shred of

him. Not his scribbled notes, voice messages or anything he'd given her or left at her place.

It *hadn't* been as pathetic as it sounded. It had been therapeutic. Educational. To analyze the mementos and the events associated with each, to familiarize herself further with the workings of the mind of a unique son of a bitch.

The lessons gained from such in-depth scrutiny had been invaluable. No one had ever come close to fooling her again. No one had come close again, period. No one had surprised her, let alone shocked her, since.

Leave it to that royal bastard to be the one to do it.

She resisted the urge to blink in hope that his email would disappear. She did squeeze her eyes, but opened them to find it still staring back at her. His unread message, somehow bolder and blacker than the other unread ones. As if taunting her.

The subject line read An Offer You Can't Refuse.

Incredulity swept inside her like a tornado.

But wait! Why was she thinking it was an actual email from Vincenzo? Some spammer with some lewd scam must have hacked into his account. Yeah. That was it. With a subject line like that, this had to be the only explanation.

Still...it was strange that Vincenzo hadn't deleted her from his list of contacts.

Whatever. This email belonged in the trash.

But before she emptied it, her hand froze on the button, an internal voice warning, *Do that and go nuts wondering what that email was really all about.*

Okay. She had to concede that point. Knowing herself, she wouldn't be able to function today if she didn't know for sure.

But what if she opened it, only to find some nasty surprise? In the name of her quest for peace of mind, she should delete the damn thing.

God. That bastard was reaching through time and space, tugging at her like a marionette. Just an email with an inflammatory subject line had her spiraling down a vortex of agitation as if she'd never exited it.

Maybe she never had. Maybe she'd only been bottling it up, pretending to be back to normal. Maybe she did need some blow to jolt her out of her simulated animation. Maybe if this *was* an email from him, it would trigger some true resolution so she'd bury his memory once and for all.

She clicked open the email.

Her gaze flew to the bottom. There was a signature. His. This *was* from him.

All the beats her heart had been holding back spilled out in a jumbled outpour. And that was before she read the two sentences that comprised the message.

I can send your family to prison for life, but I'm willing to negotiate. Be at my penthouse at 5:00 p.m., or I'll turn the evidence I have in to the authorities.

At ten to five, Glory was on her way up to Vincenzo's penthouse, déjà vu settling on her like a suffocating cloak.

Her dry-as-sand eyes panned around the elevator she'd once taken almost every day for six months. The memories felt like they belonged to someone else's life.

Which wasn't too far-fetched. She'd been someone else then. After a lifetime of devoting her every waking hour to excelling in her studies, she'd reached the ripe age of twenty-three with zero social skills and the emotional maturity of someone a decade younger. She'd been aware of that, but hadn't had time to work on anything but her intellectual growth. She'd been determined she wouldn't have the life her family had, one of precarious gambles and failed opportunity hunting. She'd wanted a life of stability.

She'd worked to that end since she'd been a teenager, forgoing the time dump others called a social life. And she'd believed she'd been achieving her goal, graduating at the top of her class and obtaining a master's degree with the highest honors. Everyone had projected she'd rise to the top of her field.

But though she'd been confident her outstanding qualifications and recommendations would afford her a high-paying and prestigious job, she'd applied for a position in D'Agostino Developments not really expecting to get it. Not after she'd heard such stories about the man at the helm of the meteorically rising enterprise. In his corporation, Vincenzo D'Agostino had grueling standards. He interviewed and vetted even the mailroom staff. Then he had vetted her.

She still remembered every second of that fateful meeting that had changed her life.

His scrutiny had been denuding, his focus scorching, his questions rapid-fire and deconstructing. His influence had rocked her to her core, making her feel like a swooning moron as she'd sluggishly answered his brusque questions. But after only ten minutes, he'd risen, shaken her hand and given her a much more strategic position than she'd dared hope for, working at the highest level, directly with him.

She'd exited his office reeling at the shock of it all. She hadn't known it was possible for a human being to be so beautiful, so overpowering. She hadn't known a man could have her hot and wet just looking at her across a desk. She hadn't even been interested in a man before, so the intensity of her desire after one meeting had had her in a free fall of confusion.

But while she'd gotten a job she'd thought impossible, she'd thought the real impossibility would be him. Even if he hadn't had an absolute rule against mixing work and pleasure, she couldn't imagine he'd be interested in someone like her. Ce-rebrally, she knew she was pretty, but a man like him had stunning and sophisticated women swarming all over him, and she'd certainly been neither. Something he'd confirmed when he kicked her out of his life.

She'd been determined to stifle her fantasies so she wouldn't compromise her fantastic position. At least she had until he'd called an hour later, inviting her out to dinner.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dan Morris:

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