

*Be My*  
PRINCE



JULIANNE  
MACLEAN

*Dedicated to Michelle Whitney.*

*Thank you for the beautiful cross-stitch that not  
only hangs in my dining room but has  
made an appearance in this story as well.*

*Be My Prince*  
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## *Prologue*



*From the London Ballroom Society Pages*

*May 12, 1814*

### ROYAL VISIT CONFIRMED

*ATTENTION ONE AND ALL. THE editors of this paper are delighted to report upon a most auspicious event. His Royal Highness Prince Randolph of Petersbourg will set sail for London in early June and reside at St. James's Palace for one full month.*

*The handsome heir to the Petersbourg throne will discuss with the regent a political and military alliance that may result in the amalgamation of our two great and powerful naval fleets.*

*This favorable military alliance is not, however, the fuel that has fired the ambitions of the great matriarchs of the ton—for some say the true motive for the prince's visit to our fair country is to seek and marry his future queen.*

*I will therefore pose the question to our devoted and reflective readers: Who among us will be the chosen one?*

# PART I

## *Secrets*



## *Chapter*

# 1



*Carlton House, London, June 16, 1814*

THERE WERE CERTAIN DAYS OF her life when Lady Alexandra Monroe wished she had been born a man.

This, perhaps, was the most noteworthy of those days, for here she stood in the regent's overcrowded London reception room, glancing about at all the other impeccably dressed young ladies, each vying for a chance to meet a handsome foreign prince and win from him a proposal of marriage.

It was quite sickening, really, and she was half-tempted to walk out—for surely, she was above all this—but she could not do as she wished, for she had a duty to fulfill. She had been waiting a very long time for this moment.

“Upon my word, look at the jewels on that one,” her stepmother, Lucille, said as she snapped open her ivory-handled fan. “How frightfully vulgar. Just

behind me in the blue gown. Do you see?"

Alexandra leaned to the left to peer over her stepmother's shoulder. "Indeed I do."

She, too, opened her fan with a smooth flick of her wrist and took note of an older woman by the mantelpiece, studying her with boiling menace. The woman leaned closer to her own charge and whispered something that caused the girl to swing her head around and sneer.

*Honestly.* This whole evening was nothing short of a bloodthirsty, cutthroat competition. All the ladies were trussed up in their best gowns and jewels, eyeing each other with icy rancor.

*If only we had swords and muskets, then the portrait would be complete.*

She cheered herself, however, with the notion that it would all be over soon, for she had every intention of charging ahead in the next few minutes and tramping them all down into the dust. Every last one of them. Quickly and without mercy, because no one in this room deserved to sit on the throne of Petersburg more than she did, and she was not going to surrender without a fight.



"They say he wishes to marry for love," the Duchess of Pembroke said as she picked up a glass of champagne from a passing footman. "It's quite charming, do you not agree?"

"I think it's a silly batch of nonsense," Lord Brimley replied. "The man is a future king. He must choose a bride who will serve some political purpose. He is responsible for the welfare of his kingdom. Such

romantic notions are pure folly, and it arouses great doubt in me that we should even desire a naval alliance with Petersburg, if this is what we will be subjected to in years to come. Kings must be sensible, and sometimes, when necessary, they must be ruthless. Romance and sentimentality have nothing to do with it."

"Well, that's the problem, right there," Baron Westley added. "The man wasn't born a royal. He has no understanding of such things. They say his grandfather was a blacksmith."

"Hush," someone hissed, from outside their circle.

Alexandra glanced over her shoulder at the daring offender—another mother of a marriageable young daughter who, in all honesty, had very little hope of catching the eye of any prince, for she was wide-eyed and fretful, like a mouse trapped in a corner by cats.

"His father has been king for ten years," the duchess said, "and that will not change. The people of Petersburg adore Prince Randolph. Make no mistake about it, Lord Westley, we are about to bow and curtsy to the future King of Petersburg, and I, for one, find his sizable naval fleet immensely desirable."

The others, most of them red-nosed and brandy-faced, threw their heads back and laughed.

"I do not understand," the young lady whispered to Alexandra. "I thought Prince Randolph was a real prince."

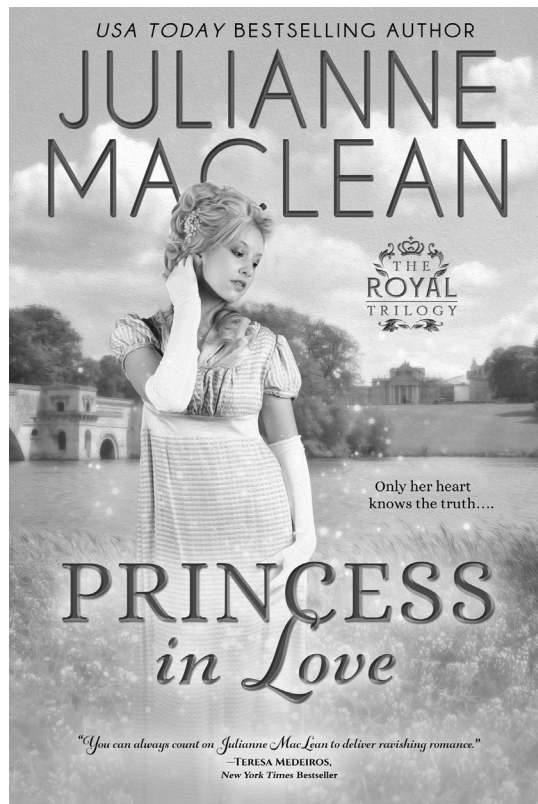
Alexandra leaned close to whisper in her ear, "He is, but without royal blood. His father was general of the military and leader of the Petersburg Revolution. Do you not know of it?" *\*End Example pages\**



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## PRINCESS IN LOVE

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## Chapter

# 1



*Briggin's Prison, Petersburg, January 1815*

SHE ALWAYS KNEW LIFE DID not follow a straight or predictable path—it was riddled with unexpected twists, turns, and steep inclines—but never had Rose Sebastian understood that fact as well as she did on the day her world turned upside down and her heart was smashed to pieces.

As the uniformed guard led her down a steep set of spiraling stone steps that seemed to go on forever into a hellishly dark dungeon in the very guts of the earth, Rose wondered if she would ever look back on these events and understand why it all happened the way it did. Would she ever let go of the regret? Would she ever be grateful for the cruel lessons she had been forced to learn?

The guard continued down a long stone corridor with torches blazing in wall sconces. The hay-strewn floor was wet beneath her feet. She had never ven-

tured this deeply into Briggin's Prison before. How medieval it seemed. The air was cold and damp and made her body shiver.

At last they reached the cell at the end of the corridor, and the guard lifted the bar on the heavy oaken door. It creaked open on rusty iron hinges.

"He's in here, madam. Shall I accompany you, or do you wish me to wait outside?"

Rose hesitated. Of course the guard must wait outside, for there were intimate matters to discuss with the prisoner.

*The prisoner.* Dear God, what if she lost her temper and struck him? Or worse, what if she took one look at him and the desire still burned, despite everything he had done?

"Wait outside, please," she firmly replied, moving toward the threshold. "Shut the door behind me and bar it. I will knock twice to signal when I am through with him." She handed the guard a ten-pound note—a small price to pay for his silence—then took a deep breath and steeled her nerves as she entered the prison cell.

The door slammed shut behind her, and she jumped at the sound of it—like a judge's gavel—while her gaze fell upon the man she had come here to confront.

He was already standing in the center of the cell, as if he had known it was she outside the door. She, who had once adored him. Trusted him. Desired him.

He wore the same fashionable clothing from a few short hours ago when he was arrested in the palace courtyard and dragged away for high treason and attempted murder.

For he had tried to kill her beloved brother, the king.

Her heart squeezed like a wrathful fist in her chest, and for a moment she couldn't breathe.

They stared at each other. His eyes darkened with fury.

*Fury?* Was that what she saw?

If so, how dare he? How dare he?

"You seem surprised to see me," Rose said, lifting her chin and resisting any urge to rush forward into Leopold's arms and beg to hear that he was safe and unharmed, for his welfare did not matter. She should not care about that. He deserved to rot down here with the rest of the rats, and she hoped he would.

"Yes," he replied. "And no, because all I've done since they dragged me here was pray that you would come to me. I could think of nothing else."

Rose scoffed. "There it is again. The flattery and seduction. Did you imagine I would learn of your peril and try to rescue you? Did you think I would drop to my brother's feet and beg him to set you free, because I had fallen in love with you? Even after what you did to my family and how you used me?"

He stepped forward, but she held up a hand. "Stay where you are, sir. I know everything. My brother told me of your plot to replace him on the throne. I know how you came to the palace to win Alexandra's affections. I know that your father has been planning your marriage to her since the day you were born so that you would one day rule this country at her side. You have been deceiving us all, and for that reason I came here to tell you that anything I felt for you in

the past is obliterated. Nothing I said remains true any longer for I was misled, and I certainly have no intention of helping you escape your sentence, whatever it may be.”

He shook his head in disbelief. “You’re lying. If you felt nothing for me, why did you come here? If I did not matter to you, you would simply watch my head roll.”

Her ire erupted again, for he was not wrong. She was not indifferent, but damn him for recognizing it. Damn him for pointing it out.

The chill of the prison cell seeped into her bones, and she rubbed at her arms. “I will never forgive you,” she said.

He stared at her. “Yes, you will, Rose, because you know I am innocent.”

She felt nauseated suddenly. A part of her wanted to weep at the loss of him. Another part of her wanted to strike him and shake him senseless until he confessed that he had treated her wrongly and that he was sorry. That he regretted all the lies and betrayals and this was all just a bad dream.

“I know no such thing,” she replied nevertheless. “My brother was poisoned with arsenic just like my father, who is now dead. You of all people know how much I loved my father. Yet you, as a devout Royalist, were behind the plot to kill him.”

He made a fist at his side. “No, I knew nothing of that, just as I knew nothing of the attempt on Randolph’s life. I love you, Rose. You know that. You know I would never do anything to hurt you.”

He tried to move closer again, and what was left

of her heart split in two. He was still the most beautiful man she had ever known, and despite all her cool, contemptuous bravado, she could never forget the passion they shared, how his touch had ignited her whole world into a boundless realm of desire.

But she must push those memories aside, for she was devastated by his betrayal and by the total annihilation of her first love.

How could she have been so foolish? How could she not have seen the truth? How would she ever recover from this?

“Please,” he said, spreading his arms wide in open surrender. “Tell Randolph I had nothing to do with the arsenic. I confess I was raised as a Royalist, and yes...my father wanted to remove your family from the throne and for me to marry Alexandra. But since the day you and I met on that muddy road in England, Rose, I have cared less and less for politics and thrones. I fell in love with you. You know it in your heart.” He inhaled deeply. “Speak to Randolph on my behalf. Tell him I am sincere. I knew nothing of the attempt on his life or your father’s murder. Treason, yes...I suppose I am guilty of that. I was part of the plot to take back the throne, at least in the beginning, but I am no killer.”

Her heart was beating so fast she feared she might faint, but it was not like before, when her heart raced simply because Leopold Hunt, the Marquess of Cavanaugh, entered a room. This was different. Everything had changed. She was not the same naïve girl she was six months ago and her infatuation was now shattered. She was jaded now and feared nothing would



ever be the same again. The sky would never be quite so blue. The flowers would not smell so sweet.

“It will fall on the court to determine whether or not you are a killer,” she told him. “I cannot help you in that regard, for clearly I am incapable of sensible judgments where you are concerned.”

“That is not true.”

A part of her wanted to believe him, but she clung to the dark shadow of contempt that had taken over her soul. “Yes, it is,” she replied, “for you were the worst mistake of my life.”

All the color drained from his face—as if she had thrust a large knife into his belly.

“I pray you will not feel that way forever,” he said.

She laughed bitterly. “Why? So that there might be a chance for us? Or perhaps you hope my feelings might change in time to reduce your sentence.”

“It has nothing to do with that.”

For a flashing instant, her thoughts flew back to that muddy road in England when the world was a different place and she still believed in heroes and fairy tales...

Immediately, Rose pounded the life out of that memory and pushed it into a very deep grave.

“If I must repeat myself, I will,” she replied. “I don’t believe you, Leopold. You have hurt me terribly. I want nothing more to do with you. I want to forget what happened between us and move on with my life. I wish you luck in the trial, but I will not be here to witness it, for I will be leaving Petersbourg as soon as possible. I intend to marry the Archduke of Austria, as planned.”

“Rose, wait...”

Again, he took a step closer, but she swung around, fearful that he might touch her, hold her, weaken her resolve. She rushed to the door and rapped hard against it with a tight fist. “Guard!”

The bar lifted and the door quickly opened. Rose rushed out.

“Is everything all right, madam?” the guard asked, looking more than a little concerned.

“I am fine,” she lied.

While she struggled to resist the treacherous urge to change her mind and return to Leopold’s side, the door slammed shut behind her.

Then suddenly, to her utter shame and chagrin, she wondered what would happen if she spoke to Randolph on Leopold’s behalf. Would he show mercy? Life in prison perhaps, instead of death?

No! She would do nothing of the sort. She was a Sebastian and had a duty to fulfill. Her brother’s new monarchy had only just begun. She must remain strong, serve her beloved country, and marry the Archduke of Austria.

She would forget about Leopold Hunt, and she would be sensible from this day forward. She would not spend another moment wondering how this unthinkable heartache had come to pass, nor would she wonder what she could have done differently to avoid it.

What was done was done. He was dead to her now. It was time to forget him, once and for all.

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Julianne MacLean is a *USA Today* bestselling author of more than thirty novels, including the contemporary women's fiction *Color of Heaven Series*. Readers have described her books as “breathtaking,” “soulful” and “uplifting.” MacLean is a four-time Romance Writers of America RITA® finalist and has won numerous awards, including the *Booksellers' Best Award* and a *Reviewers' Choice Award* from *Romantic Times*. Her novels have sold millions of copies worldwide and have been published in over a dozen languages.

MacLean has a degree in English literature from the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and a degree in business administration from Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. She loves to travel and has lived in New Zealand, Canada, and England. MacLean currently resides on the east coast of Canada in a lakeside home with her husband and daughter. She invites readers to visit her website for more information about her books and writing life, and to subscribe to her mailing list for all the latest news: [www.JulianneMacLean.com](http://www.JulianneMacLean.com)