

A Most Unfortunate Prince

By Kelli A. Wilkins

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A Most Unfortunate Prince

This time it's all about Allan... and he never expected to fall in love!

Banished by the Royal Family, pampered Prince Allan is forced to abandon his life of luxury. The former Royal Shipmaster General is sent to the worst part of the kingdom and manages to find work at the docks.

Lost in a commoner's world, Allan is miserable—until he has an unusual encounter with a saucy shop girl named Claudette.

Allan must earn the respect of the woman he loves while keeping his true identity a secret. In an effort to redeem himself in his father's eyes, he exposes a dangerous smuggling operation involving the Royal Fleet. But his loyalty to duty comes with a deadly price.

Can he keep Claudette *and* his royal title? Or will he lose her forever when she discovers his secret?

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CHAPTER 1

“Banishment?” Allan arched his eyebrows and looked at his father. “Isn’t that a bit extreme?”

King Maxwell shot him a look that would melt steel. “Extreme? You nearly got yourself, Dalton, and Elara killed in Zarmatt. Considering the circumstances, I think I’m being—”

“But Father, you can’t do that to him. What happened in Zarmatt was my fault, not Allan’s,” Elara protested.

Allan glanced at Elara. His baby sister was standing up for him—again. Elara was taking the blame for everything that had happened in Salizar’s palace—again.

He frowned as he raised a glass of imported brandy to his lips. Enough was enough. It was time to put an end to this, once and for all. Elara couldn’t keep shielding him from his father’s wrath forever.

“Let him banish me, Elara. It’s the least I deserve,” he said, brushing a lock of light-brown hair away from his face.

“You cannot be serious,” Elara argued. “You’re not going to sit there and accept—”

“Darling, sit down. Now,” Dalton said, tugging on the sleeve of Elara’s blue dress. “You know you’re not supposed to become excited in your condition.”

Allan saw Elara open her mouth to protest, then she nodded. “Yes, dear. As you wish.” Without uttering another word, she sat on the burgundy sofa next to Dalton.

He grinned. Elara had certainly changed in the two weeks since they had returned—or rather, escaped—from Zarmatt. Her short, henna-dyed hair was starting to grow out, leaving her head a mass of two-tone red-blond waves. But what surprised him most was her change in attitude.

Elara had become a different woman—in many senses of the word. Either learning she was about to become a mother, or nearly being killed by a madman, had mellowed her considerably. Dalton merely needed to ask her to do something once, and it was done without question.

The “old” Elara would have yelled and protested for hours—perhaps even thrown something against the wall—but there she was, sitting on the plush sofa like a perfect princess.

King Maxwell cleared his throat. “If I may continue...”

Allan studied his father sitting in the carved walnut chair and cringed. When the king called an immediate

family meeting in the parlor after supper, he knew they were all in trouble. His father was in a foul mood and rightfully so. Each day, more bad news soured his normally cheerful disposition. Even learning about the impending arrival of Elara's child hadn't cheered him much.

"Allan, I see no other choice but to banish you because of your irresponsible behavior in Zarmatt."

"But I'm fine. Elara's fine. Why don't we forget it and move on?" he asked, daring a peek at his father.

King Maxwell scowled, furrowing his red eyebrows into his wrinkled forehead. "You may be fine, but what about the sailors who died when Salizar sank my trading ships? What about the loss of cargo? Shall I forget about the shipping and trade agreements you were supposed to negotiate, then botched?" He pursed his lips. "Am I to forget about all that because you said so?"

Allan stared at the burgundy and gold carpet and sank lower into his chair. Although he hated to admit it, his father was right. He was guilty of making a royal mess of everything.

"And what have you done to redeem yourself since you've returned? Nothing. Not one damn thing. You flit about here without a shred of responsibility, running off to parties, getting drunk, gambling, and whoring for days on end. Is that how little you care?"

He was about to answer when the parlor doors opened and Wesley the Weasel walked in. Allan saw Elara roll her eyes. At least he wasn't alone in despising their older half-brother.

"Well, if it isn't the Crown Prince of Pomposity," Allan quipped, then rattled the ice in his glass.

"Not taking the news very well, eh?" Wesley asked, tossing his head back and peering down his pointed nose. "I thought my idea was rather brilliant," he said, smirking. "Oh, Dalton, Elara, I see you're here for the fun, too."

Elara looked away and didn't say a word.

"Hello, Wesley," Dalton muttered.

Allan sipped his drink. It was refreshing to know Dalton couldn't stand Wesley, either. Despite their recent disagreements, at least they were united on one front.

He peered at Wesley over his glass. The more he drank, the more his hatred for Wesley leaked out. Tall, scrawny, and pale with a face like a horse, Wesley would inherit the throne someday, but he hadn't inherited any good looks. It was hard to believe they were related.

"Father, won't you reconsider?" Elara asked. "Allan knows he—"

“You’re hiding behind her skirts?” Wesley asked, gesturing at Elara. “Aren’t you man enough to stand up for yourself? You need to have your baby sister fight your battles for you?”

“Shut the hell up,” Elara grumbled. “Nobody wants you here.”

Wesley glared at her. “You’re lucky you’re not being banished yourself, sister, you—”

“*Half-sister*,” she corrected. “Thankfully.”

“You’re nothing but a spoiled brat. If all your screwing hadn’t put *someone’s* child in you, I’d see you banished, as well.”

Elara gasped. “Why you—”

Dalton bolted to his feet and crossed the room in two strides. “Take that back, you weasel-faced bastard, or I swear—”

“Dalton, sit down,” Maxwell bellowed. “I will not have any more fighting.”

Dalton cursed under his breath and returned to the sofa.

Wesley cleared his throat. “As I see it, you’re in no position to argue, Dalton. You have no authority here. You’re merely married to *her*.” He pointed at Elara. “And let me tell you all something. One day, I will rule

over this house, and when I do, my first royal act will be to toss all of you out on your pampered, spoiled asses.”

Allan sighed. God save the monarchy when Wesley took over. “Are you quite finished? Really, Wesley, making all those threats because you’re jealous of Dalton.”

“What? Why would I be—”

“Because he can sire a child. He’s capable of producing an heir. You’ve been married to that hag for ten years, and what do you have to show for it?” Allan paused. “But then again, I wouldn’t let you near me either if I was your wife.”

“Enough,” Maxwell shouted. “Why can’t you ever get along? This type of behavior is what got you into trouble, Allan. And you don’t seem one bit upset by it. You have no sense of responsibility and don’t understand there are consequences for your actions.”

“Father, I—”

“Do you know how many times I’ve had to answer to the Royal Council for what you did? They wonder why I let you conduct business at all, considering your reputation. They are screaming for your head.”

Allan slouched lower in his chair. Over the years, he’d learned to let his father rant and rave and get his anger out of his system. Arguing was pointless. Upon return from Zarmatt, his father had stripped him of all

his royal duties and appointed Wesley the Royal Shipmaster General. He regretted his royal screw up, but the past couldn't be undone. How did his father expect him to redeem himself?

"You're lucky we don't hand you over to the Royal Council," Wesley added. "They requested your presence at the next meeting. They're demanding explanations for what happened," he said, glancing at the drink in Allan's hand. "Aside from the usual 'he was drunk and out of control,' of course."

Allan closed his eyes. This was bad. *Very bad*. But he wouldn't let Wesley see how his words affected him. If Wesley saw any sign of vulnerability, he'd exploit it to his advantage. There was no way to win against Wesley. He had their father fooled into thinking he could do no wrong, and as the eldest son, he was heir to the throne.

"Your banishment begins tonight," Maxwell stated.

He snapped his eyes open. "Tonight? Isn't that a bit sudden?"

"Father, you can't. He hasn't had a chance to make preparations and... it's dark out," Elara whined.

"He's lucky I didn't banish him the moment he returned," Maxwell said.

"Fine. Where are you sending me? To stay with Edward, my *real* brother and *true* heir to the throne? Or to the castle in Dunwallon?"

“You’re being banished, not sent on a retreat,” Maxwell answered. “Get this through your brandy-soaked head, Allan. You’re being cut off. That means you get nothing. No horses or carriages, no houses or servants at your disposal. You’re on your own for food, money, and shelter. I’m allowing you to take one trunk of clothing. In two hours, a carriage will drop you off in the village of Pittston in Lower Wexford.”

“Lower Wexford? With commoners? For heaven’s sake, the place is unlivable. It’s a cesspool of filth overrun with criminals. What will I do there?”

“Fend for yourself,” Maxwell answered. “Grow up. Find work. Think about what you’ve done. Lord knows I’ve coddled you and Elara too much over the years.” He shook his head. “I see no other way to make you realize the seriousness of the situation. Banishment for a year will change your attitude.”

“A year?” Elara jumped to her feet. “You cannot send him away for a year.”

“Don’t worry. You won’t be sitting here missing him,” Maxwell said. “Time away will do you a world of good, too. I’ve made arrangements with Dalton’s family. You’re going to spend time with his relatives in Lerwick.”

“What? Why? They don’t even like me.”

“Elara, you know that’s not true,” Dalton said.

“At a time like this, you need to be around women,” Maxwell stated. “Dalton has several girl cousins who can council you on... maternal matters. His aunt has graciously agreed to help instruct you.”

Allan bit back a grin as Elara flopped onto the sofa, grumbling. Being sent to stay with Dalton’s stuffy relatives might be worse than banishment. Elara couldn’t stand being fussed over, and she never was able to make friends with other women.

He drained his glass and staggered to his feet. “Well, this has been fun. Even I know when I’m not wanted any longer. Since my carriage to hell leaves soon, I suppose I should go pack.”

He patted Elara’s shoulder as he strolled past. “Don’t worry little sister. Everything will be fine.”

* * *

“Everything will be fine, my ass,” Allan muttered as he slammed the door to his private chambers. He strode across the thick green carpet and poured himself a drink from the bejeweled crystal decanter.

How the hell could he get out of *this*? In two hours, he would be carted to the worst part of the kingdom and dumped off like rubbish.

He paced the room, sipping his drink. He was being banished. Not sent off to one of the manor houses for a week or two until father calmed down, as had happened

in the past. No, this was much worse—actual banishment for a year.

“Dammit to hell.” He pushed back the heavy sense of dread that had been gnawing at him all evening. At least he had kept his composure and showed no reaction when his world had crumbled around him.

He’d played it cool, calm, and unconcerned. It wouldn’t do any good to get upset and give Wesley the satisfaction of seeing him panic or beg for another chance. He was above that.

But now what would he do? Forced to live like a commoner, he’d be cut off from all the luxuries of royal life. No servants. No meals served to him four times a day. Where would he live? How would he—

A knock on the inner chamber door interrupted his thoughts. “Who is—”

Before he had time to finish, Elara burst in. “I cannot believe father let Wesley talk him into this. You know this was all his idea, that sniveling, weasel-faced twerp. He’s probably not even a royal.”

“Easy, easy,” he said, chuckling.

He and Elara had always suspected that Wesley wasn’t truly the king’s son. Wesley resembled Maxwell’s first wife, and bore no trace of Maxwell’s warmth and good nature. He was a cold, calculating opportunist, cruel to servants, and acted like he ruled the

world. Was he Maxwell's heir, or had the young king been duped by his scheming first wife?

"Try not to get excited, Elara. You'll bother your baby."

Elara's green eyes searched his. "What will you do? Nobody's been banished in over a hundred years, and even then it was only done because of an overt act to take over the throne." She pouted. "Really, Allan. I feel awful about it."

He rested his hand on her shoulder. "Sweet Elara, look at you." He tousled her hair. "Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. You should concern yourself with more important things. You're going to Lerwick with Dalton. You have a baby coming. Don't fret over me moving out and losing my allowance for a while. You'll be so busy with baby preparations, you won't even miss me," he said, trying to keep his voice cheerful.

"A while? Father said a year. By the time you return—"

"Do you honestly think he would throw me to the wolves for a whole year?" he asked, then sipped his drink.

Perhaps if he drank more, he wouldn't think about what was going to happen to him. Deep down, he was scared to death that his father really *would* disown him for a year. He'd have nothing, no title, no funds, nobody would know who he was. He'd be... a commoner.

He shuddered at the thought and gulped down his brandy. No matter what, he wouldn't trouble Elara with his fears. Although she was the toughest woman he'd ever known, she was in a delicate condition.

When the royal physician confirmed she was carrying a child, Elara had lain in bed and wept for two days straight, crying that she wasn't ready to have a baby. Nothing anyone said or did could console her. Since then, her mood had improved, but she was under orders not to get upset or excited.

"Don't worry. I won't be gone long. I promise to be here when you have the baby." He kissed her cheek. "Father will probably punish me for a month—two at most—then he'll reconsider and let me come home. He's not truly banishing me. He merely wants to make a point," he said, hoping his words sounded convincing.

"Besides..." He crossed to the bar. "...Father doesn't need me," he said as he refilled his glass. "After what happened, can you blame him for wanting to get rid of me?"

Elara rushed to his side. "Don't say that. He's trying to make you more responsible." She bit her bottom lip. "At least that's what Dalton says. Perhaps if you apologized to Father and told him you were sorry—"

"I did. Three times. He—"

Another knock on the door interrupted him. He sighed. "Let me guess. Come in, Dalton."

The door opened and Dalton entered the room. He nodded at Elara. "I figured I'd find you in here."

"Dalton, you've got to do something," Elara pleaded. "Talk to my father. Try to reason with him."

"I just did." He shook his head and his black hair bounced off the shoulders of his brown tunic. "No luck. I even offered to bring Allan to Lerwick with us, and keep an eye on him."

"Like you did in Zarmatt?" Allan asked, chuckling.

Dalton frowned. "That's exactly what your father said. He's very angry. And rightfully so."

"Oh, for God's sake." Allan rolled his eyes. "Am I going to get another lecture from you? How many times do I have to say I'm sorry, Dalton? Find me a way to change the past and I'll do it, but don't stand here in my own chambers and chastise me for something I already know."

Allan leaned against the oak bar. Ever since they had returned from Zarmatt, Dalton had acted cool toward him. They had shared a close friendship until he'd nearly gotten Dalton and Elara killed with his foolishness.

"I'm well aware I acted like an ass." He placed his empty glass on the bar. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go pack for my banishment," he said, then headed into his private bedchamber.

Elara clutched his arm and turned him to her.
“Allan, what will you do?”

He gazed into her green eyes and shrugged. “I
haven’t the faintest idea.”

* * *

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelli A. Wilkins is an award-winning author who has published more than 100 short stories, 19 romance novels, and 5 non-fiction books. Her romances span many genres and heat levels.

Beauty & the Bigfoot, a paranormal-comedy, was published in September 2017.

Kelli released ***Trust with Hearts***, a contemporary romance, in July 2017. Her third gay romance, ***Four Days with Jack***, was released in June 2017. Kelli's trilogy of erotic romance novellas, ***Midsummer Night's Delights***, ***Midwinter Night's Delights***, and ***Ultimate Night's Delights*** was published in spring 2017.

Loving a Wild Stranger was published in January 2017. This historical/pioneer romance is set in the wilds of the Michigan Territory and blends tender romance with adventure.

Kelli's third Medallion Press romance, ***Lies, Love & Redemption*** was released in September 2016. This spicy historical western is set on the Nebraska prairie in 1877.

Her writing book, ***You Can Write—Really! A Beginner's Guide to Writing Fiction*** is a fun and informative guide filled with writing exercises and helpful tips all authors can use.

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